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THE BELIEFS OF UNBELIEF

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STUDIES IN THE ALTERNATIVES TO FAITH

BY

W. H. FITCHETT, B.A., LL.D.,

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'HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE," "THE UNREALIZED LOGIC OF RELIGION,"
"WESLEY AND HIS CENTURY," ETC.

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PROEM

The New Unbelief

How many things hard to credit one must believe in order *not* to be a Christian.—Newman Smyth, *Reality of Faith*, p. 46.

The world sees today an unbelief of a new type: vague, loitering, evasive, and strangely contented. Doubt of the sterner sort, doubt which "goes sounding on its dim and perilous way," doubt which is an anguish, and which is much nearer faith than it knows, is much less common than formerly. In its stead has come an unbelief which is as indefinite as a mist, as obscuring, and as little shaken by storms. It is not a landscape, but a vapor. "Christianity," it whispers, "is, if not untrue, at least unnecessary: life can be lived well enough without it." It is a mood untouched by any disquieting sense of ethical responsibility. It seems to itself to dwell in a realm in which the challenge of that "stern lawgiver" duty does not run. Unbelief, for these easy souls, is a sort of lotus-eater's

paradise. Its spirit is expressed in Tennyson's lines:

> There is no joy but calm!
> Why should we only toil the roof and crown of things?
> . . . Is there any peace
> In ever climbing up the climbing wave?

The new unbelief, in brief, does not deny; it does not affirm. It would describe its own mood as a state of mental equipoise, equally remote from both affirmation and denial. "If he does not accept the Christian faith," a doubter of this school would say, "neither does he reject it." His mood toward religion is that of a judge not yet satisfied with the evidence. He is weighing the arguments on both sides, and doing it with dispassionate leisureliness. No argument as yet has emerged which closes the case, and he waits for its appearance with easy content.

This seems to its proprietor a dignified attitude, and one which even has about it a gratifying halo of intellectual distinction. In addition, it is, or seems to be, delightfully free from any uncomfortable moral responsibilities. It is surely possible to argue that the obligations of

a creed do not begin until the creed itself has been finally proved. So the doubter regards his conscience as uncommitted to either side. It is not responsible for any decision, for it has come to none. The soul stands, or rather sits, in a state of contented equipoise, betwixt mighty opposites.

But, in mechanics and in morals alike, a state of equipoise means a point of exact balance betwixt opposing forces; and to justify the alleged equipoise of doubt, not only the forces for faith and against it, but for doubt and against *it,* must be ascertained and assessed. And it is certain that in the case of most doubters of the type here described no process of this sort has been undertaken with sufficient seriousness. The difficulties of religion are examined under a microscope, but the owner of the microscope does not apply it to his doubts or to the difficulties of his doubts. That they have their own difficulties, indeed, is, somehow, regarded as a matter of quite secondary consequence.

But in religion, and as an attitude toward

the great affirmations of religion, doubt is remote by measureless degrees from that comfortable, noncommittal attitude usually claimed for it. The human soul cannot sit, perched on a note of interrogation, amid the tremendous opposites of belief and unbelief, consenting to neither. Unbelief is itself a choice. It is an act, an affirmation, a creed, with the subtle, reflex influences on life which belong to a creed.

We live under conditions which make any imaginary state of suspended decision impossible. Life runs swiftly and in the imperative mood. Conduct can know no pause. The conscience refuses to dwell in a vacuum. Each instant, whether we choose it or not, we must *act*.

Doubt seems to its possessor to suspend—or at least to postpone—the authority of divine law. But that very suspension of law becomes itself a rule of conduct, with all the responsibilities of law.

Time, in a word, is intolerant of hesitations. Life has to be lived. The swift, unresting mo-

ments throng past us, each one, in turn, a complete probation; each one bringing with it a challenge that pierces to the conscience and judges it. At every instant the stern challenge of duty has to be met and answered. The ship, to vary the figure, is on the wide and restless sea, with its mysterious tides, and brooding tempests, and far-off harbors. Sail we must! Some course must be chosen: some hand must be on the wheel—*is* on the wheel.

Let us imagine a captain laying side by side the conflicting charts of Faith and Doubt. He is undecided betwixt the two. He accepts neither. But that refusal to choose is itself a choice. To let the ship drift is a choice. The absence of a course *is* a course!

Doubt, it is somehow taken for granted, means only the refusal to decide. It is not an act, but the arrest of actions. But in religion that arrest of action is itself an act of the highest significance. It stops the train! It cancels out the most tremendous factors in the arithmetic of life. It thrusts aside, as though they were nonexistent, measureless obligations. It

forbids the hand of Christ to touch the conscience. It puts God himself in the category of forces it is safe to neglect. What decision could be more tremendous in scale than that "refusal to decide," which decides so much!

Is it true that religion has no authority to affect conduct until it has been proved with the certainty of one of the axioms of Euclid? Till the last difficulty in religion is solved, and the last mystery is dissipated, have we the right to treat it as nonexistent? In what other realm of life do we treat doubt as a discharge from the obligation to act, or wait until the final uncertainty has vanished, before we move? We buy and sell, we risk money, and health, and happiness, and life itself on what are not certainties but probabilities. We do this every day. The whole business of the world would be arrested if this were not the case.

And this law of action runs into the ethical realm. Duty there, as everywhere else, begins long before an unclouded certainty is reached. The fool of the psalmist whispered in his heart: "There is no God." The easy-tempered doubt-

er of today does not go as far. He affirms nothing—even in a whisper! "There *may* be a God," is his position, "but the proof is not sufficient to make his claim absolute."

Now, at the point of practice, and if he treats his doubt as a discharge from all necessity for practice, it is clear that such a doubter stands beside David's fool without his excuse. If a man has ascertained finally that there is no God, he may act on that certainty. But *not* to be sure, only to doubt, and yet to act as though doubt were a certainty, and canceled all duty, is to out-fool the fool of the psalmist.

It is easy to show, in this way, that the very make of the world, the insistent, unceasing challenge of events, the mere rush of the swift moments, make any easy, uncommitted equipoise in the realm of religion impossible. But the doubter tricks himself when he imagines that his doubt represents any such equipoise.

Doubt is itself a complete interpretation of life and the universe. That it is an interpretation which empties life of meaning, makes duty a guess, dismisses God from his own uni-

verse, as an unproved hypothesis, and turns the characters of the moral law into fluctuating ciphers, capable of being read in a hundred ways, need not be considered just now. The point to be insisted on is that doubt is in itself a creed, with its own conscious or unconscious affirmations; it is to be judged, like every other creed, by its affirmations.

The notion that doubt has no positives, and is committed to nothing, is almost universal. Its literature is one long, loud oratorio of mere denials. It seems to have no theology of its own for which it is responsible.

But, it must be repeated, our doubts are creeds! Creeds only half seen by their owners, perhaps, because they are not steadily looked at. But they are definite though unformulated creeds in spite of that. Every denial is one facet of a proposition of which the other facet is an affirmation.

Take the foundation belief of all religion—the doctrine of God. In substance, there are, in relation to it, three schemes of thought possible—theism, atheism, pantheism. Is a defi-

nite choice betwixt these three inevitable? Is an uncommitted attitude betwixt them impossible? No—a theory which denies—or at least cancels out—all three *is* thinkable. Huxley has invented a name for it; Herbert Spencer has drawn it out into a stately philosophical system. It is agnosticism.

But agnosticism is itself, in turn, a creed, and one of the most positive and practical quality. Who denies that twice two makes four, need not affirm that they make three, or five. He may assert they yield a result unknown. But the formula, $2 + 2 = x$ is a proposition as definite, and one which carries with it as directly practical results, as the proposition that $2 + 2 = 4$.

The only difference is that he who keeps his accounts, and carries on his business, on the theory that $2 + 2 = x$, will discover that this is an arithmetic which—equally with the formula, $2 + 2 = 3$ or $= 5$—leads straight to the insolvency court.

Every possible alternative to Christianity, to sum up, is itself a belief; and being a belief it

has its own special and inevitable ethics. It has for conduct the office which the axioms at the beginning of a geometrical problem have for the conclusion at its end. Conduct is the conclusion for which a man's creed is the premise. "Our chief business with Christianity," says Chalmers, "is to proceed upon it." That is true of every creed. On what else should a man "proceed"?

Ethics are not to be chosen, like toys, because they are pretty; or, like tools, because they are useful. They are conclusions from accepted postulates, and are as inevitable as the conclusions of geometry. Does anyone imagine that the conclusions of the problems in Euclid are *movable,* that they can be attached to any set of deductions at pleasure?

The spectrum analysis, as everyone knows, makes visible, by a law woven into the very structure of things, the elements present in a ray of light. No matter how remote is the source of the light—it may come from Arcturus or Orion—but under the test of the spectroscope the elements in it register themselves

in certain fixed lines, as characteristic as a human signature. Does anyone suppose that the scientist can fit, at pleasure, to any particular ray of light, any scheme of lines he wishes? The lines in the spectrum are the reflex of the elements in the ray. They are not accidents; they are results. And because they are results they are a revelation.

And life is the spectrum of the creed behind it. Exactly as the lines made visible by the spectroscope are the register of the elements in the ray, so the ethics of a creed follow, by a law from which there is no escape, from the structure of the creed itself.

Each creed, it must be repeated, yields laws for conduct; and it is accredited or discredited, in advance, by the standard of life which it creates. And nothing is more certain than that all the rivals of Christianity are afraid of their own ethics. They disown them; they refuse to so much as remember them! They try to steal the ethics of Christianity—its emotions, its motives, its vocabulary, its hopes. What spectacle is more familiar than that of men

struggling to keep the moral system of Christianity, and even its sun-filled horizon, while denying both its history and its doctrines?

And for a time they succeed. That the denial of Christianity does not shape conduct instantly, and in every case, to its own strange and dreadful pattern, is due to the fact that the very unbelief which rejects Christianity cannot escape its influence. Something of the perfume of Christianity is in the very air of the world. The wholesome salt of its ethics is in the blood of the race. The man of no faith is still the child of whole centuries of faith.

The choice of the soul, to sum up, does not lie, in the last analysis, betwixt Belief and Doubt; but betwixt rival forms of belief. If the Christian creed is not accepted, there emerge certain alternative beliefs perfectly definite in character, one or other of which must take its place. For the temple of the human soul cannot be left empty, swept, and garnished. Some Tenant must come! Men are unwilling to see the inevitable and underlying affirmations of doubt; the dark alterna-

tives to faith, from which there is no escape; they try, as we have said, to keep the Christian solution of the great problems of duty, while rejecting the axioms on which that solution is built. But no attempt is more certainly predoomed to defeat.

These papers are an attempt to define and assess what may be called the positives of doubt; the strange beliefs which lurk under the mask of unbelief. Faith suffers—and rightly suffers—incessant challenge for its credentials. But let us stop for a moment to consider what are the credentials of doubt. The fight has hitherto raged round the evidences of religion; it is surely time to ask what are the "evidences" of irreligion. The Christian faith has its difficulties, it may be frankly admitted; but let the question be seriously considered: What are the difficulties of the alternatives to that faith?

No fair-minded disputant, of course, will wish to push what may be called the logic of the dilemma too far; and no one with any adequate view of either truth or history will deny

that the alternative doctrines of today may prove, with ampler knowledge, to be the complementary truths of tomorrow. But this applies only to truths of what may be called the secondary order. Some truths are absolute; some denials are final. It is idle to blind ourselves to these; it is cruel not to deal honestly with them.

The positives of unbelief, in a word, exist, and are inevitable; they are tremendous in scale and results; they carry with them their own laws of conduct. And the real test of unbelief lies there, and nowhere else.

BOOK I

GOD

PART I

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

CHAPTER I

God in the Christian Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.—*The Apostles' Creed.*

The Christian faith is a chain of positive truths, the first and greatest of which affirms the existence of God. "In the beginning—God." These are the first syllables in the story of the universe, the starting point of Christian belief. "Theism," says Professor Gwatkin, "has been the greatest force in history, and remains the general belief of serious men." And before considering the inevitable alternatives to that fundamental truth, it is worth while to put, in plain and untheological language, what the Christian faith at this point teaches.

But in what words shall Christian belief about God express itself? The subtleties of metaphysics, the formulæ of logic, even the

definitions of theology, seem to have no office in this realm. What the soul asks is rather, as Dr. Parker says, the six wings of Isaiah's seraph, with twain to cover our face, with twain to cover our feet, and twain with which to fly.

It is easy to multiply stately phrases about God. He is eternal in existence, measureless in power, stainless in holiness, of goodness infinite. All the forces of nature are but the expression of his energy. All its life is the creation of his breath. All its beauty is the signature of his wisdom. But as a vehicle for expressing the conception of God, language fails or betrays us; and thought is scarcely less adequate than speech where God is its object.

If we take all noblest and highest things within the range of our senses—the majesty that dwells in the height of the heavens, the daily repeated glory of the dawn, the flame-pictures of the sunset, the ordered splendor of the stars; and if to such heights and depths of material glory we add the great things of the spiritual order—all that is purest in the saint, and wisest in the sage, and tenderest in human

affection; and if we multiply these by innumerable degrees, and to infinite heights, we have yet not reached an adequate conception of God.

There is no human measure of his glory. The curve of our thought is too low for the conception of his greatness. Our broken terms of love fail to interpret the wonder of his love. Our yesterdays and tomorrows cannot express his eternity.

We take the great and resounding words of human speech, and describe God as Almighty, Eternal, the Invisible, the King of kings and Lord of lords. But the phrases give us only faint and broken aspects of God. We can speak of him only in stammering phrases that are in conflict with each other. He dwells in the height of the heavens; nay, the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. And yet he dwells, too, in the cup of the violet; he is present in the joy of a little child, in the sigh of the broken and contrite heart. He guides the planets through space. But he watches, too, the flight of the sparrow; he numbers the footsteps of a child.

He is unthinkable, dwelling afar, in that light to which no man can approach; and yet —it is the paradox of his glory!—he gives himself to our human thought in the nearest, sweetest, simplest terms. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ.*" So a human face, written with the characters of a love which shines on us through suffering, is the highest interpretation of the unseen and infinite God. And if we might choose the form in which this Eternal and Almighty God—the God of infinite holiness, who is yet the Father of our spirits—should come to us, would we not ask that it might be in human terms; in the shape which, for what is best in us, has most of appealing power; in the vision, that is, of a love which stoops to uttermost sacrifice for us?

Oh, wonderful God! At once so high, and yet so lowly; so far off, and yet so near. His holiness is the terror of our sin. His will is the law and measure of our duty. His love

is the hope of our penitence. His fidelity is the pledge of our happiness. "God," says Dr. Parker, "is a Fire that cannot be touched; a Life too great for shape or image; a Love for which there is no equal name." And when all the subtleties and capacities of language have been exhausted to express what God is, and have failed us, somehow we find that the little and familiar words of human speech best present him to our faith: "God is love," "God is light," "God is a Spirit," "a God of truth," "our Father in heaven." Here is a golden chain of creeds, each in words of one syllable!

The God of Christian faith is not an impersonal energy, "a stream of tendency," "a Power not ourselves," whether making for righteousness or not. How could love awaken toward an intangible Force? How could prayer whisper its petition to a "stream of tendency," or hope cling to it? God is a Person; and we find the witness, and proof of the personality of God in the deep, imperishable sense of personality in ourselves. This is the central fact of our own nature. Moral quali-

ties would be impossible without it. All the relationships of life would perish if it did not exist. And it is incredible that God can have given his creatures something greater than he possesses himself.

At these great heights, it may be admitted, it is easy for human feet to stumble and human thought to fail. We are tempted to ask what room is there for our poor little personality in God's universe? Is not that universe filled and possessed by his infinite personality? What is the dividing line betwixt his personality and ours? Must not our personality be lost in his?

A diluted Hegelianism has for the moment become popular; it teaches that God is not a person, but Personality itself. All other personalities are but so many thoughts of the Divine Mind, rays of the Divine Consciousness. God has created the universe only as a mode of realizing himself; and he has no other consciousness than the sum total of consciousness among his creatures. But this is a metaphysical puzzle; it cannot survive translation

into clear speech. If we conceive of our personality melting into God's personality, morality itself must perish, for all acts become God's acts. This is the doctrine of Hegel, and of a philosophy older than Hegel, but it is a philosophy that has failed. It hides God behind a haze of metaphysics; it certainly leaves no ground for sober Christian faith. That faith affirms not only the infinite personality of God but the indestructible personality of man.

The personality of God, it must be admitted, is a conception too great for the human mind, but its denial is a vaster incredibility than its assertion. The logic which vindicates Christian faith at this point can be packed into a very brief compass. Truth, goodness, and love, we are sure, are attributes of God. What is truth but the infinite and absolute in thought, or goodness but the infinite and absolute in will, or love but the infinite and absolute in feeling? Now, if God be truth, he thinks; if he be goodness, he wills; if he be love, he feels. But truth, goodness, love, are the qualities of a person. "They are the characteristic," says

Principal Garvie, in the Hibbert Journal (p. 567), "of consciousness. They have meaning only within self-consciousness." To deny personality to God is to deny at once that he possesses either truth, goodness, or love—a denial that is worse than atheism.

It is because God is a Person that he is capable of personal relations with his creatures. Is it thinkable that an imperfect human spirit can come nearer to a fellow-spirit, equally imperfect, than God, the Father of our spirits, can come to us all? Of all relationships possible to us none is so close, none so sweet, none so sure, as that into which God comes.

Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

It is commonly said that to ascribe such qualities to God is only a proof of the tyranny of anthropomorphic conceptions. But what is dishonoring to God in such conceptions? We do not degrade the Almighty by saying that he thinks and knows and wills. "If the power behind nature were destitute of these faculties," says Professor Momerie, "it would be infinitely inferior to the poorest type of man. . . . In

power, as such, there is nothing divine. What care I for a Power that is eternally unconscious? It may have strength enough to dash the entire universe into shivers; but let me realize that it is senseless, and I look upon it with contempt."

The Christian conception of God, it is to be noted, grows ever higher as our knowledge of his methods and the scale of his works increases. Science, wisely read, does not rebuke faith at this point; rather, it endows it with a new vision, and kindles it to a new exultation. God is better known to us than he was to our fathers. David saw the glory of God written in the heavens, and he tells us in the music of a great psalm how the sight affected him. But how much of those heavens did David know? He could not pierce their heights, nor count the multitude of the stars, as we have learned to do. He spelled out only the first syllables of their mystic speech. He never saw more than the mere outlying scouts of the great army of rushing planets, and never imagined more than those he saw.

But for us, with each new discovery of science the heavens grow wider, and higher, and crowded with yet vaster hosts. We have learned that in their depths a thousand million stars are wheeling; and so we have a vision of the scale of God's thoughts such as no saint or prophet of olden days had.

We have another revelation, too, of God, of which the earlier ages never dreamed. Science is teaching us that God is in things infinitesimal as surely, and on a scale as great, as he is in things that are vast. When we untwist the last and innermost thread of matter we find God there, hiding the splendors of his omnipotence in the curve of an atom. The vision of a hundred million stars, hung in the heights and depths of space, is hardly so wonderful as that latest discovery of science—a constellation hidden in every molecule; so that the dust beneath our feet has, burning in it, unseen stars as wonderful in their minuteness, as swift and steadfast in their tiny orbits, as Uranus and Sirius are in their vastness. And since God must be as great in spiritual as he is in physical

terms, redemption gains, in this way, an ever new credibility from each new discovery of science.

The cross of Calvary, with its tremendous significance, could hardly find standing ground beneath the low skies of early human knowledge. But the measureless heavens, as we have learned to know them, rising ever higher, the scale of the physical universe, with its constantly expanding horizons, by the index they offer to our very senses of the curve of God's thoughts in the lowest circles of his universe, make credible the incredible story of our redemption.

The last and highest word about God that Christian faith knows is that great saying of Saint John—"God is love." So we believe the universe is built on love; it is shaped to ends of love; it is moving to a goal of love. And Christian ethics are but love translated into terms of duty. All human obligations are summed up in the terms of love. Not the intellect, but love, is the organ of spiritual knowledge. "Everyone that loveth is born of God,

and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. . . . God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

There is a divine accent in such words. They break in on us from another realm than any merely human literature knows. Here is a strain of the music of heaven stealing across the discords of earth. Law, on this reading, is but the name for an impulse, an emotion, a spiritual mood, by which the creature is knitted into eternal moral harmony, not only with the Creator, but with his whole unsinning creation.

This conception of God is the key which unlocks all the mysteries of the universe. It explains how the universe came into being. It explains the height of the star-filled heavens, the energy which floods all space, the march of the seasons, the beauty of the sea and of the flowers. It explains, too, the holiness of the saint, the courage of the martyr, the child's gladness, the mother's passion of tenderness. Oh, naked, desolate, dreadful universe, if God

did not exist in it, and rule over it, and make it the servant of his purpose, and the reflex of his character!

For what is the guarantee to us of the order of the universe? Why are we sure that the stars will not break loose, that some vagrant comet may not wreck the earth, that the daily miracle of the dawn will continue, that the march of the seasons will still

> bring the flower again,
> And bring the firstlings to the flock?

Science shows that the earth, to its uttermost atom, and the whole depth of space through which the earth is rushing, thrill with terrific forces. What assurance have we that they may not at any moment destroy us?

We talk of "the constancy of nature"; but constancy is a quality of character, and the constancy of nature is but the expression in physical terms of the character of God. The *anima mundi* is a well-known phrase in philosophy and is the favorite pantheistic name for God; but in a wiser sense than pantheism knows, and with a loftier meaning than philos-

ophy can teach, Christian faith believes God to be the Soul of the universe. This lifts the scheme of nature up into the realms of purpose, and makes it the instrument and servant of character. A living human body without a soul, a mindless thing, incapable of reasoned purpose, would be a scandal and peril to its kind. And this is what the universe must be apart from God. God is the divine Soul of the universe; and this *anima mundi* stands to us in a relationship which he himself interprets to us by the words, "Our Father."

CHAPTER II

The Evidences for Faith in God

The whole diversity of created things could have its origin only in the ideas and the will of a necessarily Existing Being. —Sir Isaac Newton.

What are the evidences for this great faith? "There are many proofs," says Professor Gwatkin, "but no demonstration." God cannot be packed into a syllogism, or "proved" in terms of logic. But neither can anyone prove, in terms of logic, that the world exists, or that we ourselves exist! The three final postulates of thought are God, the world, and ourselves; and they are all incapable of absolute metaphysical proof. Who limits his belief to that which can be demonstrated, in terms of formal logic, must deny them all; and all, as a matter of fact, have been denied. "Must we have logical demonstration of that which underlies logic? Must we see God in the sky, as Lalande scoffs, or get him into our laboratories, for analysis, before we are persuaded?"

Demand for logical proof in relation to God is absurd, and yet what an energy of logic is arrayed on the side of Christian belief! Many so-called "evidences" of God's existence touch only the fringe of things, but others run back into eternal certainties. Let us take two—and they are but samples—one resting on the very structure of the visible universe, and one wrought into the structure of our own minds.

The highest expression of mind is to take a number of unconscious, unrelated physical things, and set them in relations which make them the channel of a meaning of which they are unconscious, the servants of an intelligent purpose of which they know nothing. Such an office laid on material things, or extracted from them, is only possible in terms of mind.

The letters of the alphabet, for example, are a cluster of unrelated symbols, each standing for one of those separate air waves called sound. But put together in a certain order they make a proposition in Euclid, or a sonnet by Keats. Now, it is certain that the letters themselves could not construct the theorem, or set

the cadences of the sonnet chiming. Behind the unconscious symbols, and using them as its servants, is the mind of the geometrician, the imagination of the poet.

The seven notes of music are in nature, and exist independently of man: but they are merely a succession of vibrations in the mindless air. Beethoven knits them by subtle and innumerable harmonies and contrasts to each other, till deep calls to deep, and an ordered tumult of sweet sounds is born, making perfect music. The wedded harmonies of the great fugue are more than the notes of the octave. The "Moonlight Sonata" is the seven notes, *plus* Beethoven.

Now, exactly as the twenty-six letters of the alphabet could not make Hamlet without the mind of Shakespeare behind them, or as the seven notes of the octave must have the genius of Handel flowing through them before the "Hallelujah Chorus" is born, so the unrelated elements of the physical universe must have an infinite and controlling Mind behind them, and making them the servants of intelligent pur-

pose, before the order of the worlds is born. That the physical universe is a unit is a final proof of God's existence, for that unity is born of the relations of things, relations woven by what must be the energies of an Infinite Mind.

The ordered unity of the material universe is taken for granted. "Here," in the words of Martineau, "is a network of universal media, which weaves the contents of space into one system: a running thread of progressive history blending all Time into one drama." But the miracle it represents—the miracle of an incalculable number of things so knitted together into relation and interdependence with each other that they produce a common result—is not realized.

The stars are separated, yet every particle in each is at play with every particle in all other stars, to farthest Sirius. Is there any rhythm, indeed, born in the poet's brain, or woven of music in Chopin or Mendelssohn, like the rhythm of the worlds, the unjarring harmonies of the planets? Still less can any harmony born of wedded sound in music represent

the concord and agreement with each other of all the separate forces which make the physical universe!

The universe is concrete music. It is a song of which God is the singer; a poem with stars for syllables, and the measureless forces that rush through space for melody. If the letters of the alphabet cannot make Hamlet without the mind of Shakespeare behind them; if the seven notes of the octave must have the genius of Handel flowing through them before the "Hallelujah Chorus" is possible, how certain it is that the unrelated elements and forces of the physical universe must have an Infinite Mind, using them as its servants, and setting them in terms of mind, before the order of the worlds can exist.

And how far this miracle of coördinating purpose—the supreme act and proof of mind —extends! It is, we are sure, coextensive with the physical universe. Its existence is the constant and most certain presupposition of science. Its disappearance would be the wreck of science. Imagine intelligence standing

amazed in a realm where chance reigned, and law was unknown! The Mind which thus stamps itself on the whole universe, in characters of purpose visible even to our dim intelligence, must be infinite; and there is no certainty known to reason more absolute than that such a Mind exists.

The absolute proof of God's existence is thus found in the relations in which the mindless elements of the universe are set with each other, producing an order of which they are not only incapable, but unconscious.

An equally absolute proof of the existence of God is found, again, wrought into the very constitution of the human mind. The intellect is so made that, whatever it may pretend to do, it cannot accept an endless succession of second causes; a chain with no first link. An Ultimate Cause, itself uncaused, is a necessity of thought; and the qualities of this Cause, we cannot escape believing, are interpreted by its effects. It must be rational, since the universe is built on terms of reason. It must be moral, or whence comes conscience? It must be per-

sonal, or how is it that we are endowed with personality? And a First Cause which is rational, moral, and personal—is God!

"It is impossible," says Herbert Spencer, "to avoid making the assumption of self-existence somewhere." All the creeds, in fact, begin with exactly that assumption. Atheism assumes the self-existence of matter; pantheism assumes the self-existence of everything; the Christian faith rests on the self-existence of God. As William Arthur argues, in his Religion Without God, we are shut up to one or other of three conceivable starting points: An Eternal Nothing, which originated both mind and matter; Eternal Matter, which originated mind; or an Eternal Mind, which originated all things. The first assumption is inconceivable; the second is impossible and absurd; the third is the only theory in which the sane mind can finally rest. And it is the creed of Christianity! "Belief in God is the first instinct, and the last conviction, of sane intelligence."

But are there no difficulties in this great creed, no shadows in the glory of God's nature?

Yes; theology would be incredible if it were not dark with mystery. In this realm, finite thought wanders amid infinities. "The power which the universe manifests to us," says Herbert Spencer, "is utterly inscrutable." But in these words he is only repeating unconsciously the challenge of Scripture: "Who can know the Almighty unto perfection?" "Clouds and darkness are round about him." How can the Infinite be uttered in terms of the finite?

And there are mysteries and difficulties, not only in the very conception of God, but in the facts of his universe. How can it be otherwise? We see only one tiny point in the great curve of God's plan: we have the record of only one brief moment in the history of his universe. But Christian faith, while it admits that "clouds and darkness are round about him," still affirms with rejoicing confidence that "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." "God's way is in the deep, his path is in the great waters; his judgments are not known." But through all the ages that lie behind us, and still, today,

he leads the souls that trust in him like a flock, though it is by hands, and in paths, and toward a goal, they cannot see.

Oh blessed faith! "When I kneel"—says that true saint and fine thinker, William Arthur —"when I kneel at the throne of grace, and say, 'Our Father, which art in heaven,' it seems as if all my being were flooded with the light of a countenance full of unutterable life and love. 'Thou art a shield for me,' I cry; 'a shield for me. My glory, and the lifter-up of my head.' Yea! even so. And therefore unto the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever. And let all the people say Amen! This, then, be our witness before the living and the unborn: we which have believed do enter into rest!"

PART II

THE ALTERNATIVE TO BELIEF IN GOD

CHAPTER I

Atheism

The atheistic theory is not only absolutely unthinkable; but, even if it were thinkable, it would not be a solution.—Herbert Spencer.

The alternatives to the Christian faith about God are easily named. "It is impossible," to quote Herbert Spencer once more, "to avoid making the assumption of self-existence somewhere." We may believe, with the atheist, in the self-existence of matter; or, with the pantheist, in the self-existence of everything; or, with the Christian, in the self-existence of God. Or we may deny all three with the agnostic. But he who rejects the belief of Christianity as to God must put in its place one of these three—atheism, pantheism, agnosticism.

It might be imagined that pantheism, as an alternative to Christianity, could be dismissed almost without debate. The word is used in literature as a label, but does any sane man under civilized skies really hold the creed behind the label, with all the consequences

which follow from that creed? Yet pantheism, it cannot be denied, has inspired some famous books, captured some great thinkers—on the Continent at least—and yielded some picturesque philosophies. But, stripped of all ingenious disguises, what is the hard and naked quality of its teaching?

Pantheism starts with a very different premiss to atheism; but, paradoxal as it may seem, it arrives at the same conclusion. Atheism denies any creation, since there is no Creator. Pantheism denies creation too, but it is because there is no creature!

But there are darker shadows still in this dark creed. On the pantheistic theory God did not create the universe. He *is* the universe—all that is dark in it, as well as all that is bright. Everything is but a disguise of God. All acts are, directly or indirectly, his acts; all wills are but modes of his will, all characters disguises of his character. He has no other consciousness than the sum total of consciousness his creatures possess. His personality is only the aggregate of all other personalities.

Everything *is* God; evil as truly as good, falsehood as surely as truth, cruelty as pity, Jack the Ripper as well as Paul the saint; the lust of the brothel, the tortures of Russian prison cells, the obscenities of African obi-worship, as truly as the love of the mother and the courage of the martyr. The atheist who denies there is a God is himself a mode of God, and his atheism is a reflection of something in God—if it is only of God's doubts about himself!

This is a dreadful creed, a denial at once of personality in man and of perfect goodness in God. It teaches the divinity of evil as well as of good. On this theory there *is* no sin, unless God himself is the sinner.

This doctrine cuts the very roots of all ethics. It is not reason but the mere bewilderment and scandal of reason. To ask what argument sustains such a theory is absurd. According to it we are all machines, or rather will-less bits of that great machine we call the universe. Why ask one little fragment of the machine for an argument to prove that the machine exists? It

is like asking the grease-box of a steam engine for a philosophy of the engine itself.

There remain two possible alternatives to theistic Christianity, atheism and agnosticism, and each may be considered in the briefest possible terms.

It seems, perhaps, to the sober mind, incredible that, outside a lunatic asylum, atheism can exist. To waste ink or argument upon it is slaying the dead. But atheism is, unhappily, a real creed for many; for some, indeed, it is a creed proclaimed in almost arrogant accents. In the last French census nearly five million people wrote themselves down "atheists." On the Continent there are many writers who would repeat Feuerbach's words: "It is clear as the sun, and evident as the day, that there is no God; and, still more, that there *can* be no God."

And we need not emigrate to foreign skies to discover atheism. Mrs. Besant, in her Gospel of Atheism, declares that "the name 'atheist' is one of the grandest titles a man can wear. It is the order of merit of the world's heroes."

She grows lyrical in praise of atheism. "Its soil," she cries, "bears the fairest flowers and the strongest trees. Over it sweep the purest winds and shine the warmest suns!"

But there is a nearer and more deadly atheism than any which finds expression in words. It is a vague sense—lying like some deadly vapor on multitudes of souls, stealing like some invisible but poisonous taint into men's blood—that the existence of God is doubtful. It has never been proved. Perhaps, after all, he does *not* exist! And this nebulous idea has for those whom it possesses, the fatal offices of an opiate. It drugs the conscience. It shuts out the spiritual universe. It acts as a blindness, obscuring the heavens. It makes life, in a literal sense, godless.

It is worth while, if only for a moment, to look seriously at atheism as a definite creed; to assess its meaning and evidences, and the ethics natural to it.

Atheism is the most spacious and tremendous of negatives. "There is no God": a creed of four words, but how much dark significance

is shut up in the brief syllables! The heavens, it declares, are empty. The world has no Maker. Life has no Judge. Conscience has no law, or has none speaking to it from any spiritual realm. The visible universe is an accident. It has no creative Mind above it, and no intelligent purpose within it.

Now, it is an intellectual absurdity to ask for the "proofs" of atheism. It is clear at the outset, and without argument, that this is a creed essentially incapable of proof. A universal negative of this sort is unthinkable. Proof of it—if it exists—is possible only to universal knowledge. To reach the great certainty that there is no God, "what ages and what lights," asks John Foster, "are requisite for this attainment?" In a classic and oft-quoted passage, Foster argues that a man must himself possess the attributes of God before he can be entitled to declare that no God exists.

He must be omnipresent to be sure of his creed, for if there is any realm from which he is absent, God may be there! He must be omniscient, for if there is any fact he does not

know, perhaps that unknown truth is the fact that God exists.

How shall a finite intelligence, set on a little island in the measureless ocean of space, and whose existence, measured against the duration of the universe, is less than the tick of a clock, reach such a stupendous height and certainty of knowledge as to entitle it to proclaim to the shuddering worlds, "There is no God"!

Atheism, moreover, is in deep and eternal quarrel with the very structure of the human mind. Here, lying about us, is the visible universe. It has to be explained; and every creed, in effect, is an explanation of the universe. Now, to say, with atheism, that the visible universe has no Maker, is to declare it to be that unthinkable thing—that impossible thing—a stupendous effect without a Cause. A creed which sets out with such a proposition deserves to be treated as being simply a foolish jest. We cannot, if we would, believe in so much as an old shoe without a shoemaker. And to assert of the majestic system of things about us, graven with characters of a design to its

minutest atom, flooded, as our very senses teach us, with all the attributes of mind, that no designing Mind is behind it, that it sprang uncaused out of nothing—this is the wildest unreason.

The denial of any antecedent cause necessarily involves the denial of any beginning; so atheism, carried a step further back, means the assertion that the universe has existed through infinite past time. This theory Herbert Spencer says is "unthinkable," and, therefore, impossible. It is a more direct and simple answer to say that such a theory is in open quarrel with plain facts. That the world had a beginning in time, geology and astronomy amply prove; and if it had a starting point, it must have an end.

"The existence of an Ultimate Cause is the highest of all our certitudes," says Herbert Spencer, in one of his latest writings.[1] Belief in an Ultimate Cause is that august thing, "a necessary datum of thought." "Among our beliefs," Spencer declares, "this has the highest validity of any." All that remains to be

[1] Nineteenth Century, No. 89, p. 6.

asked is whether the nature and character of this Cause are reflected in the universe he—or it—has created; whether, having endowed us with personality, it is a Person; whether having given us intelligence, it is itself intelligent; whether, having placed us in the moral order, it is itself moral? If so, this Ultimate Cause is exactly what Christian faith declares it to be—an Infinite and Eternal Spirit, the Father of our spirits, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth.

The mind can, perhaps, run back in imagination, and conceive of the self-existence of space, and of nothing else; of space without either mind or matter or motion in it. But, then, how shall mind and matter and motion come out of it? "Infinite space and no matter in it, no mind in it, no force or motion in it—is this," asks William Arthur, "to be the mother of the universe?" Does anyone wonder that this conception of "Nothing, distinguished from all other nothings by the power to develop into Something," is dismissed by Herbert Spencer as "an absurdity"?

To Spencer himself atheism was frankly intolerable. Even the "unthinkable abstraction" which, in the earlier stages of his thinking, he put in the place of God, came, in later stages, to be recognized as too thin and naked a conception. So Spencer invents a whole procession of sonorous phrases for it—phrases which grew steadily more concrete and definite "until at last," as Frederic Harrison complained, "it emerges as the Ultimate Reality, the Inscrutable Existence, the Creative Power, the Infinite and Eternal Energy by which all things are created and sustained."

The fashion in which Herbert Spencer tried to fill up the empty heaven of his faith with sounding names is only an illustration of the fact—discoverable everywhere in the sad realms of unbelief—that the human mind, by some deep and mysterious instinct, resents a vacuum where faith ought to be. It is intolerant of an empty heaven. The very atheism which declares the throne of the universe is vacant insists upon putting Something upon it.

Comte, for example, having denied the exist-

ence of a God, proceeded to invent, as a substitute, his "Grand Etre." He proposed to his followers, as an object of worship, the sum total of humanity, minus its useless members, and plus a percentage of the more helpful animals. "We begin," says William Arthur, "with an unknown sum of past, present, and future men; from this we are told to subtract an unknown sum total of useless men; and to the remainder we are told to add a fourth unknown sum of helpful animals."

The four unknowns, put together, were to make one great Known, the Supreme Being of M. Comte. The first sum total was an abstraction; the sum deducted was an abstraction; the result is an unknown fraction of an unknowable abstraction. And this is the "Grand Etre" which, as an object of worship, Comte thinks will take the place of God! No wonder that it kindled the scorn of a strong if skeptical intellect like that of Huxley. "That the incongruous mixture of bad science and eviscerated papistry out of which Comte manufactured the positive religion will be the heir of the ages,"

he writes, "I have too much respect for the humanity of the future to believe. The Positivist asks me to worship Humanity; that is, to adore the generalized conception of men as they ever have been, and probably ever will be. I must reply that I could just as soon bow down and worship the generalized conception of a wilderness of apes."

Atheism, since it dismisses an intelligent Maker from the universe, must regard that universe as the product of chance; and this is the fact which made atheism intolerable to Darwin. "The impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me," he declared, "the chief argument for the existence of God."

It is possible to express in arithmetical terms the vast incredibility that the physical universe is the product of chance. "When only eleven planets were known, De Morgan showed," says Professor Momerie, "that the odds against their moving in one direction round the sun, with a slight inclination of the planes of their

orbits—had chance determined the movement —would have been twenty billion to one. And this movement of the planets is but a single item, a tiny detail, an infinitesimal fraction, in a universe which—in spite of all arguments to the contrary—still appears to be pervaded through and through with purpose. Let every being now alive upon the earth spend the rest of his days and nights in writing down arithmetical figures, let the enormous numbers which these figures would represent—each number forming a library in itself—be all added together, let this result be squared, cubed, multiplied by itself ten thousand times, and the final product would still fall infinitely short of expressing the probabilities against the world having being evolved by chance."

Let it be repeated that atheism is eternally and essentially incapable of proof. It is a guess. And, regarded as a guess, it has every hateful quality. It leaves the reason like a fluttering and dying bird in an atmosphere exhausted of oxygen. It wraps the imagination in darkness. It blackens the heavens. It pro-

claims the human race to be Fatherless. It empties the universe of purpose. This complex web of unresting energies is a machine, not only without a Maker, but without an end before it, or a mind within it.

What conception can be more terrifying to the imagination than that of a mindless universe! We are passengers in a train rushing at maddest speed, but whither we cannot tell. There are no signals on this line; no engineer has laid the rails; no driver is on the foot-plate. Happiness, for us, depends on the presence of certain qualities in the universe—love, foresight, justice, righteousness. But these are personal qualities; and since there is no personal God these things are not to be found in the system to which we belong. We are an orphan race, wandering under pitiless and empty skies.

Who would open his soul to such a creed unless whipped into the acceptance of it by the iron scourge of irresistible proofs? But atheism is a creed necessarily and eternally naked of all proofs.

CHAPTER II

The Ethics of Atheism

Unbelief saves itself from universal contempt by really living on a wider faith than it allows. . . . What if unbelief should live up to its creed!—Newman Smyth.

What, it may be asked, are the ethics natural to the creed of atheism?

From a Christian standpoint, atheism can never be translated into conduct, or be accepted as a basis of conduct, without an element of wickedness. Taken logically, it is nothing better than a guess; certainty about his theory of the universe is, for the atheist, in the nature of things impossible. Now, to act on the tremendous negative, "There is no God," may be morally justifiable when certainty is reached; but short of that certainty, it is nothing less than wickedness.

Shall the measureless obligations under which—if God exists, and is our Judge—we all stand, be dismissed on the *chance* that there is no God? That chance must become cer-

tainty before it supplies a law for conduct; and yet any such certainty is impossible. To hold atheism as a creed is to quarrel with reason; but to act on it as a law is to break with instinctive and rudimentary morality.

Looked at as opposing creeds, it will be seen that Christianity and atheism are, at this point, parted by one profound difference. Christianity is a theory of the world which, reason declares, ought to be acted upon as if it were true, until it is disproved. It is a creed which the sane man must wish to be true. It fills the sky with sunshine. It floods the universe with gracious purpose. It is a challenge to the soul, putting it under the sway of great motives, and calling it to high standards. Moreover, to act on the Christian theory carries with it no risks, even if in the end it be disproved. For if, in that last moment when time ends, it dissolves into a dream, the Christian has been better for it while he lived, and will be no worse for it when he is dead. At the moment of death—if there actually be no God—believer and unbeliever will drop out of existence on equal terms,

into that eternal and dreamless sleep which, on the atheistic theory, awaits the soul.

But the exact opposite, at every point, is true of atheism. True or false, it is a hateful creed. It has for the universe the office of an eclipse. It stretches out empty skies over a Fatherless world. It cuts the very sinews of morality. Everyone must wish it to be untrue. No one ought to act upon it till it is proved up to the point where doubt becomes impossible. And what tremendous risks pursue it! The atheist treats God as nonexistent in his own universe; he dismisses his claims as worthless; he puts aside his love as a fool's dream. And he does all this on the strength of a guess. He surrenders transcendent hopes, and betrays obligations which, if they exist, are overwhelming, on the authority of what must be called debating society logic. What other human being risks so much on a warrant so frail!

Many atheists, thank God! are good men; but this is in spite of their creed. When Shelley wrote "atheos" after his name on Mont Auvert he was on fire with a generous hate of

wrong, which burned from a divine source. Atheists are often better, as Christians are often, alas! worse, than their own creed. And it must be remembered that even the man who denies that God exists breathes an atmosphere charged with the idea of God and with the great moral forces which stream into human life from that idea.

But the point to be considered is what, on its own principles, and on its principles carried to their logical conclusions, is the morality of atheism; and to that question the answer is clear.

Atheism is the denial of all authoritative ethics. Since there is no Lawgiver, there can be no law. The interval betwixt right and wrong is a geographical or social accident. There is no God, himself infinitely righteous, who enacts rightdoing, and will punish wrongdoing. All actions, impulses, motives, on the atheistic theory, have an equal right to exist. Hate is as natural as love; the rogue is as much a part of the system of things as the saint, Nero as Saint Paul. Why should not Nana Sahib

kill the women in the Murder House? The deed shocks us, looking at it across fifty years, but it gratified that cold-blooded Hindu at the moment; and on the atheistic theory his gratification is as legitimate a part of the system of things as our horror.

On the principles of atheism, in brief, what final standard determining whether a given act is good or bad can exist? There are laws of society, but these vary with latitude and longitude. Slavery is a social law on the Congo, polygamy in Utah, the bowstring in Turkey, wife-killing in Annam.

There is, again, the law of utility. Some acts in their consequences are beneficial to society, some are injurious. But if utility is our one standard, we must wait until the consequences of an act are known before we can determine whether it is to be approved or blamed. And who can measure the consequences of acts? When conscience, as the organ of the moral sense, and the interpreter of a divine law, has been dismissed, atheism can supply nothing which will take its place.

The way to test the ethics of atheism is to imagine what the world would be with God dismissed from it, and all the motives and emotions and restraints that go with the conception of God canceled. What a desolate landscape, lying under black and empty heavens, arises in the imagination at such a thought! From the root of belief in God a thousand great hopes, heroisms, aspirations, affections break into blossom like flowers at the whisper of some divine spring! If these suddenly perished, it would leave the world a desert.

A world of atheists and conducted on atheistic principles! A society with its institutions, its literature, its politics, its domestic life untouched by the great forces which stream from the idea of God! A race with a mindless universe about it, a hopeless grave beneath it, and empty heavens above it! What would happen in such a world? Prayer would die, and all the forces which go with prayer. Worship of religion would perish. Grief could have no comfort, mystery no explanation, truth no necessary sacredness, loss no compensating equity.

In an atheistic home no mother would teach her child to pray. Love would be left with broken heart and empty hands, for what epitaph can atheism write upon a little child's grave? The feet made beautiful because they bring good tidings would run no more on errands of pity to far-off lands and wild races. Can the human imagination picture a committee of atheists starting off, at risk and cost to themselves, to transform savage races into a nobler type by the news that no God exists?

A new cruelty would creep into the world's politics and into its social life if atheism became universal. The whole conception of man would be changed. The great law of love—love which lifts its face toward God—would be unwritten, for at the crown of the heavens there sits no God. And the twin and equal law of love—love flowing from man to man—would not survive.

The sublime vision presented in the New Testament of the Son of God, the Judge of the race, in the hour of his judgment rewarding all service to man as service done to himself,

and all neglect to man as neglect of himself, has done more to make pity a virtue, to lift beneficence up to the sacredness of a religion, than all the speculations of the philosophers, and all the maxims of the moralists. Christ stands behind the hunger of the poor, the loneliness of the orphan.

> Who hates, hates Thee: who loves, becomes
> Therein to Thee allied;
> All sweet accords of hearts and homes
> In Thee are multiplied.

Now, the unbelief that blotted out that belief would certainly kill pity as a duty. How could literature survive with universal atheism as its atmosphere! How could poetry sing, or fancy dream, or hope breathe? As well expect flowers to bloom under skies empty of light, or birds to sing in an atmosphere exhausted of oxygen. In a universe emptied of God, what strange terrors would steal out of the void into the chamber of man's imagination. What cruel and obscene shapes would haunt the empty skies! Atheism *has* added to English literature one singer—James Thomson—who, to

something of real genius as a poet, added the gloom of utter unbelief. And looking at the world through the lens of his atheism, he sees it, and sings of it, as a "City of Dreadful Night":

The City is of Night; perchance of Death,
But certainly of Night; for never there
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath,
After the dewy morning's cold, gray air;
The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity;
The sun has never visited that city,
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

The City is of Night, but not of sleep;
There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain;
The pitiless hours like years and ages creep,
A night seems termless hell. . . .

Thomson changes the scene of his poem from this terrible city to a desert equally terrible:

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: All was black,
In heaven no single star, on earth no track;
A brooding hush, without a stir or note,
The air so thick it clotted in my throat;
And thus for hours; then some enormous things
Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings;
And I strode on, austere;
No hope could have no fear.

In that sad realm one soul bankrupt of faith calls to another:

O brothers of sad lives! They are so brief:
A few short years must bring us all relief;
Can we not bear these years of laboring breath?
But if you would not this poor life fulfill,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death.

This unhappy poet, himself an atheist, holds that suicide is the final logic of consistent atheism. Through the city that John saw coming down from God out of heaven, there flows the river of the water of life. And in the "City of Dreadful Night" that atheism builds, this sad poet, too, sees a stream flowing; it is the river of suicides!—

The mighty river, flowing dark and deep,
With ebb and flood from the remote sea-tides,
Vague sounding through the City's sleepless sleep,
Is named the River of the Suicides;
For night by night some lorn wretch, overweary,
And shuddering from the future yet more dreary,
Within its cold secure oblivion hides.

It is clear that atheism is, or ought to be, a creed of tears. "'There is no God.' Is this," asks Pascal, "a thing to be said with gaiety?

Is it not, rather, a thing to be said with tears, as the saddest thing in the world?" Professor Clifford, after he had broken definitely with Christian faith, yet recognized the wreck atheism makes of the universe. He pictures himself amid the glory of a spring sunrise, gazing on the empty heaven stretched over a soulless earth, and realizing with a sense of utter loneliness that "the Great Companion was dead."

A serious thinker, who felt himself compelled by force of logic to hold this creed, ought to hope that he might be mistaken; ought to long to be refuted. Henry Rogers, indeed, says that he "ought to conceal his belief as if it were a guilty secret, and to dread making proselytes as men refrain from exhibiting their infectious sores, or their plague-tainted garments in the eyes of the world."

Atheism, as thus pictured, is, then, one of the inevitable alternatives to Christian faith. Now, in spite of its hateful qualities, if it came to us arrayed in proofs which to the honest mind were final, proofs so strong that to reject them would be disloyalty to reason, we must consent

to it as a creed. Truth is to be accepted, though it destroys us. But atheism, it must be insisted, is nothing more than an eternally unproved and unprovable guess. It is in quarrel with the strongest law of the sane intellect. Belief in it is intellectually lower than belief in the dead gods and scandalous goddesses of heathen mythology.

And let the two great opposites be put side by side. Here is the Christian faith in God, with its far-stretching evidences, its pure ethics, its sane interpretation of the universe, its unbroken procession of saints, its hopes that have the energy of creative forces. It is a faith which visibly makes for the happiness of the world. Beside this lofty figure, as an alternative, stands atheism: a guess, a negation, a creed without a proof, black with gloom, overshadowed with tremendous risks; a faith which has no restraint for sin, and no law for the conscience. It is a belief which must leave the race bankrupt alike in ethics and in hope.

The choice betwixt theism and atheism is the choice betwixt an archangel and—Caliban!

CHAPTER III

Agnosticism

We must replace the veil which Paul tore aside two thousand years ago. . . . We must go back to the cult of the Unknown God.—Joseph McCabe, in the *Agnostic Annual.*

The prevailing man of the future, like many of the saner men of today, will presume to no knowledge whatever, will presume to no possibility of knowledge, of the real being of God.—H. G. Wells, in *Anticipations.*

Agnosticism is but atheism writ respectable.—Dr. Aveling.

Agnosticism seems, at first sight, to be parted from atheism by a very wide interval. It does not set out with an audacious and infinite negative. The assertion that the world has no cause, or is its own cause, is an excursion into the realms of unreason in which the agnostic bluntly declines to accompany the atheist. Huxley himself attenuate's agnosticism into what is nothing else than a definition of honesty. "It simply means that a man shall not say he knows or believes what he has no scientific ground for professing to know or be-

lieve." In that sense every honest man must be an agnostic.

As a matter of fact, agnosticism starts from the same point as Christianity. It declares that the universe is an effect, with an infinite and eternal Cause behind it. "The consciousness of cause," says Mr. Herbert Spencer, "can be abolished only by abolishing consciousness itself." So the agnostic theory begins not with a doubt, still less with a denial, but with a true and positive faith. The throne of the universe, it affirms, is not empty. There sits upon it an eternal Energy from which all things proceed. This infinite and eternal Energy—taking Spencer as the interpreter of agnosticism—is the Ultimate Reality. Its existence is "a necessary datum of consciousness," and doubt about it is to be dismissed as an act of treason against the laws of thought themselves. "Among all the beliefs possible to the human mind this," says Herbert Spencer, "has the highest validity of any."[1] How, then, can agnosticism be described as "atheism writ respectable"?

[1] First Principles, stereotyped edit., p. 98.

But the agnosticism discussed here, it must be remembered, is not that distressed mood of doubt, which haunts some tender souls; the hesitation of a sensitive conscience, which will not say it is sure while a single flaw in the argument remains. The popular form of agnosticism is not a doubt; it is a creed—convinced, militant, triumphant! It is a nescience which talks in more confident accents than science itself dares to employ; and it springs from a philosophy that blots out not merely the distant heavens but much nearer and more familiar landscapes.

The kinship of this type of agnosticism to atheism becomes evident at what may be called the second stage of its logic. It begins, as we have seen, by proclaiming the existence of a First Cause. It affirms, on the authority of the laws of thought themselves, that he—or it—exists, and is, in fact, the One Reality of the universe. It then, with a little spray of metaphysics—a few passes of debating society logic—dismisses this one Reality out of the kingdom not only of worship, but of knowledge, and

therefore of consideration. It cancels it as a force affecting conduct. It may be the Supreme Cause of everything else; but in the practical business of human life it is the cause of nothing. It is essentially and eternally the Unknowable; and the Unknowable, in the real business of life, is the nonexistent.

Some of the more belligerent agnostics, indeed, declare, not only that we cannot know the Ultimate Cause of our existence but that there is no reason why we should *want* to know it. "Why should we wish to know?" asks the author of Mr. Balfour's Apologetics. "What is God?" he demands again, in a key of scorn. "The word represents a phantom, born of man's ignorance and fear."

Now, we have only to look at dogmatic agnosticism as one of the two practical alternatives to Christian faith, and a whole procession of incredibilities instantly make their appearance. Some belong to what may be called the moral order.

Tried by the test of the black, incredible shadow it casts on the entire landscape of

human life, agnosticism is not merely as hateful as atheism; it is more hateful, and this by almost measureless degrees. Atheism declares: "The heavens are empty. There is no God. We are orphans." Here is a creed of tears! But orphanage, after all, is not the worst of lots. An unseen father may be loved. A dead father may be a tender and kindling memory.

But agnosticism bids us see, sitting at the crown of the universe, a Figure shrouded in a mist through which breaks no gleam of light. He—or it—hidden in the heart of that darkness is the Father of our spirits. He could give us the revelation of himself. Nay, he has so made us that the desire to know him is part of our very nature. How deep and indestructible is desire in us for that knowledge is written on every page of history. The temples and altars of every age and every land are its witnesses. All human literature reflects it.

But he who put that impulse in us placed it there that he might jest with it. He hides himself from his offspring. He has put, as if in mockery, the instinct of worship within us;

he has made it the purest force in our nature, the root of a thousand noble things. Yet it is an instinct that lies! It has been created only to be cheated.

There is no other example in nature of an organ left without an answering element and use. All that we know of the method of nature makes it incredible that the eye could come into existence if no light waited for it, to be its servant, and the field for its exercise. But on the agnostic theory the profoundest instinct in our spiritual nature is that cruel and bewildering paradox, a faculty without a use; an eye set in a kingdom of darkness!

And reason, it may be added, has this to say of religion. It represents exactly what, if God does exist, *ought* to be our mood toward him. He is our Maker. Our spirit takes its life from the breath of his lips. His bounty feeds us. His works delight us. The highest exercise of our intelligence is, in Kepler's words, "to think his thoughts after him." That we should love him is surely the first impulse and the highest expression of duty. It is the one supremely

rational mood of the soul. To be like him ought to be the sleepless aspiration of the spirit that comes from him. "Make me beautiful within," was, Plato tells us, his highest prayer to God. But only the thought and presence of God can make the inner nature beautiful.

Yet this, the highest mood of our nature, which has on its side the utmost warrant of reason, is, on the agnostic theory, the most complete delusion! It is nothing more than a mockery; a lie, set in the high places of the human soul, and set there by the hand that made the soul, for all knowledge of God is eternally and essentially impossible. What incredibility can be more stupendous than this!

And, strange to say, this instinct in us which turns toward God, and which agnosticism declares to be eternally predoomed to defeat, is visibly the root of the best things in human life. What heroisms it inspires! What charities leap into existence at its touch! What saints it has begotten! What a literature it has created! And we are asked to believe that behind the heroisms of uncounted martyrs, be-

hind the hymns of worshiping multitudes, the prayers of little children, the hopes of dying saints, is—a mockery. Religion is nothing but an illusion!

This, surely, is one of the most incredible statements ever offered to the human mind. "Even as an illusion," says Professor Gwatkin, "the belief has to be accounted for; and if it is an illusion, it is beyond comparison the mightiest of human illusions. This illusion has been the greatest nation-making, nation-binding, nation-breaking power in history, the great guiding, lifting, transfiguring power of human life. This illusion has not only nerved men, and even tender women, to face a cross of shame before the world, but given them the higher courage, and still higher patience, needed for the obscure and hopeless toil of continual failure in the work seemed appointed them. If the greatest force of history and life is an illusion, can we trust even the reasoning which professes to prove it so?"[1]

But the antecedent incredibilities of agnos-

[1] The Knowledge of God, vol. i, p. 116.

ticism on the moral side grow as we meditate on them. If the best thing in us is the most false, the Unknowable Cause of our lives intended it to be so. He planted in us that loftiest impulse of which the human soul is conscious —the aspiration after himself—only that he might mock it. This is a creed which makes the veil on the face of "the Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed" a mask which hides the grinning face of a devil!

Yet if the Unknowable intended to conceal himself, and to remain always for us, his creatures, an unguessed Riddle, he has somehow failed in that strange purpose. The great secret has not been kept. We have found out enough about the Undiscoverable to kindle a quenchless interest! We talk of him, speculate about him, build temples to him, sprinkle the landscape with churches to his honor. The very air of the world is shaken with hymns to his praise. A whole literature has been created by discussion about him. And on the agnostic theory the Unknown Cause of all things must have *meant* this to happen. He must have in-

tended that, while the discovery that he is for ever Unknowable should be reserved for a little committee of philosophers, an overwhelming majority of the human race were to be persuaded, not only that God *could* be known, but that they knew him; that they possessed a revelation of his will; that love was possible not only from God to them, but from them to God.

The Ultimate Reality, in a word, is a riddle which can never be guessed; but the human soul has been so planned by its Maker that it cannot escape spending its utmost energies in the exercise of trying to guess the Unguessable. What a cruel jest is human nature if this be the case! And the sly Jester who planned it for his own entertainment is—the Father of our spirits! On this theory man is, in Tennyson's bitter words—and in a deeper sense than Tennyson meant—

> . . . a monster then, a dream:
> A discord. Dragons of the prime
> That tear each other in their slime,
> Were mellow music matched with him.

Agnosticism, it is clear, is a creed discredited

in advance by stupendous moral incredibilities. It is a creed to be hated, since it implies that the Unknown Cause which made us has toward us a mood of scorn. But it is also a creed as dangerous as it is hateful. Its logic leaves—or in the long run must leave—morality wrecked. For it robs right of all divine sanction, and wrong of all inevitable penality, as completely as does atheism.

It is true, and is most gladly admitted, that many agnostics are upright and honorable men, with a high standard of personal morality. They keep, as a personal possession, the ethics of Christianity, while rejecting the roots from which those ethics spring. But it is the second generation which tests the morality of a creed. And the question to be considered is: What would be the moral state of the world if every other faith perished, and agnosticism became the one creed of the race?

No divine law of right or wrong could, in that case, be recognized. Men would have no vision of an Eternal Justice linking consequences to acts, and judging all men by its own

august standard. No one, on the agnostic theory, can so much as guess what is the will of the unknown Cause behind the veil of phenomena. Does that hidden Cause love truth and hate lies? Will he—or it—punish lust and reward love? No one can tell.

Herbert Spencer, the most philosophic brain ever devoted to the exposition and defense of agnosticism, protests, it will be remembered, almost with a touch of irritation, that he has no concern about morals. He believed that a certain element of mystery, which may discharge some of the offices of religion, will remain when religion itself has perished. But he warns us: "I am not concerned to show what effect religious sentiment, as hereafter thus modified, will have as a moral agent." "Will it make good men and women?" Mr. Herbert Spencer says that he has "not argued, and is not bound to argue, that it will do this." "Will it answer the purposes of religion?" "I have said nothing," he protests, "about its adequacy or inadequacy."[1]

[1] Nineteenth Century, No. 82, p. 85.

But as to its inadequacy who can doubt? The rare and fine spirits of our race, touched by what is rarest and finest in the atmosphere about them, might keep a high standard of morality even when agnosticism became universal, and all hope of any knowledge of God had perished. But what of their children—the generations brought up in a dreadful vacuum where knowledge of God is not? And what of the drunkard and the savage?

For them agnosticism has neither law nor restraint. In the words of Mr. Justice Stephen, "it can neither hang them nor damn them; how, then, can it hope to govern them?" And the problem of all creeds, it must be remembered, lies in the message it has for the crowd; for the defeated, that is; for the wrecked; for the moral failures of the race.

For agnosticism, as for atheism, morality must be built on social utility. Goodness is to find its motive, and its driving force, in the consideration, put brutal, that it will "pay." But if anyone thinks that sin will pay, or is willing to run the risk of its not paying, for

him agnosticism has neither restraint nor warning. The agnostic is not able to say, finally, and with a certainty that has its roots in the very frame of the universe, that lying, lust, hate are everywhere and always wrong; that if they seem to succeed, it is only for a time. If they succeed, they *are* right! If murder is useful—if it is only not found out—for anything that agnosticism can teach, it is beyond blame. When all morality is resolved into the question of utility, essential morality itself has evaporated. And a creed equipped with such ethics must, when it comes to its natural kingdom—when it has finally captured the imagination of the world—let loose disruptive forces that will wreck society.

Here, then, is a creed antecedently incredible, and essentially hateful; yet if it can be proved to be true, what remains for us all but to accept it? Shall we cling to a lie because it is fair; or quarrel with truth for no better than æsthetic reasons? But where is the tremendous energy of logic needed to accredit to reason a creed burdened with such results?

CHAPTER IV

The Case Against Agnosticism

The first Cause of a Cosmos to be an adequate cause and deserve the name, must be a Supreme Intelligence.—Ward, *Agnosticism,* vol. ii, p. 269.

The logic of agnosticism, such as it is, may be expressed almost in a phrase. It does not consist of any reasoned induction, gathered over a wide area of facts. Its strength does not lie in any destructive analysis of the evidences of Christianity. It consists in the alleged discovery of a metaphysical impossibility —an impossibility constituted by the very nature of the human mind—that God can come within the area of our knowledge. Such knowledge is discovered to be intrinsically and eternally impossible. It is made incredible by the very nature of knowledge itself. It has not arrived, because it *could* not!

About this alleged impossibility of possessing any knowledge of God some things are

clear at a glance. The first is that all the presumptions are against it. Professor Gwatkin puts this with a touch of dry humor which intensifies the strength of his argument. "If there is a God," he says, "a personal Being above us, and not below us, I think we may take it as possible that he may have something to reveal; and then, if he is able to reveal it, if he may be supposed willing to do so, and if man is able to receive it—on these four conditions revelation is possible."[1]

Which of those four conditions is so much as doubtful? It is certainly not the possibility that "God may have something to reveal." As little can it be that he is able to reveal it. The beasts can speak to us; is God lower than they? To doubt whether he is willing to make a revelation is to impeach his goodness. The only remaining doubt is whether man is able to receive such a revelation.

But as to this, let it be noticed that agnosticism itself is built on a paradox. It commits suicide in the act of defining itself. For this

[1] The Knowledge of God, vol. i, p. 6.

denial of the possibility of knowing anything about God is based on the amount of knowledge we *do* possess about him! How much we *must* know about God before we are entitled to announce, with absolute certainty, that all knowledge of him is beyond the reach of our intellect!

Huxley invented the term "agnosticism," but Herbert Spencer has supplied it with a philosophy; and we have only to recite the titles by which Spencer describes what he calls "the Unknowable" to see what an amount of knowledge is connoted by them. The Unknowable is "that Ultimate Existence which was manifested in infinitely varied ways before humanity arose." Surely, an Unknown which is "manifested" becomes, in part at least, the Known in the very process of "manifestation." The Unknowable, again, is "that great stream of creative power, unlimited in space and time, of which humanity is a transitory product." "A stream of creative power"—this is a conception as definite, and as surely connoting knowledge, as the great affirmation of Scripture, "God is a Spirit." The Unknowable, says

Spencer, is the All-being, the Ultimate Reality; "the same power which in ourselves wells up in the form of consciousness."[1] This procession of titles certainly presupposes a very large area of knowledge. Can that Power about which so much is known, and known so positively, be honestly described as "Unknown"?

But the assertion that God is unknowable, it will be found, is extracted from a definition of knowledge which begs the whole question, and about which only one thing has to be stated in order to show that it means something else than it seems to mean, and is, in fact, little else than a trick with words. It is a definition which proves that not only is the Ultimate Cause of all things unknowable, but so are a hundred other things that lie within the reach of our senses, things which constitute the whole machinery of practical life, and with which we deal every moment of our lives.

Herbert Spencer introduces us to a vast procession of "unknowables." "Space," he says, "is unknowable; so is matter, so is mind.

[1] Nineteenth Century, No. 89, p. 5.

Force stands in the category of things beyond the possibility of knowledge. So does motion. The earth is unknowable; we ourselves are unknowable even by ourselves." The solar system is "an utterly inconceivable object," a statement which, taken literally, reduces astronomy, as a science, to bankruptcy. We may imagine we know something about such a familiar exercise as walking; but Mr. Herbert Spencer assures us that "it is impossible to conceive of rest becoming motion or motion rest." And yet we walk!

Mr. Herbert Spencer's logic is equally confident, and equally triumphant, at all these points. And, under the spell of his argument, a limitless continent of the unknown spreads about us, and stretches from our very toes to the horizon. After proving that "the ultimate unit of matter must remain absolutely unknown," that "position in space is inconceivable," that "motion is truly not cognizable," Spencer concludes by making the soul of man himself the most hopeless of all unknowables. "The personality of which each is conscious,

and of which the existence is, to each, a fact beyond all others most certain, is yet a thing which cannot be truly known at all. Knowledge of it is forbidden by the very nature of thought."[1]

This ought to be impressive, since it is "the very nature of thought" which forbids us to know ourselves. But then Mr. Spencer goes on to say "the very nature of thought is itself unknown"; and how one unknown thing can explain and prove another equally unknown can be clear only to a philosopher.

Mr. Spencer's logic at this point may be briefly stated. Knowledge, he says, implies (1) something known, (2) someone or something that knows it. Here is the famous resolution of knowledge into the antithesis of subject and object. How can the soul know itself? If the object known is self, what is the subject which knows it? Are there two selves? The knowledge of oneself means a state in which the object known and the subject which knows it are one, and this means the annihilation of both

[1] First Principles, par. 20.

subject and object, which, to quote Euclid, "is absurd." So we get Mr. Spencer's conclusion that knowledge of ourselves is forbidden by the very nature of knowledge.

Professor Momerie, it will be remembered, cleverly applies logic, by which Mr. Spencer thinks he proves that self-knowledge is impossible to self-love. Certainly the fundamental condition of all love is the antithesis of subject and object. In love there is an object loved and the subject that loves. To say that a man loves himself is the assertion that subject and object are identical; but this is, on Mr. Spencer's logic, impossible. Therefore no man can any more love himself than he can know himself. And yet the biggest fact in human life is exactly that self-love which, on Mr. Spencer's logic, can never exist.

"Personality," says Mr. Spencer, "is the fact beyond all others the most certain"; yet, to quote Professor Momerie, "the fact which stands first in order of certainty Mr. Spencer will not allow to stand even last in the order of knowledge." He declares, in regard to it,

we are and must ever remain completely ignorant. Spencer's laws of thought, in a word, go to prove that we are sure of what is somewhat doubtful, but are not sure of that in regard to which there can be no doubt. What a paradox is this philosophy which describes beliefs of inferior validity as knowledge, and that which has the highest possible validity as ignorance!

To the practical reason it will seem unnecessary to consider too anxiously a definition of knowledge which lands us in such remarkable conclusions. Knowledge, Mr. Spencer goes on to say, can only come by comparison. There must be two or more things to be compared before knowledge is possible. Whatever cannot be referred to a class is unknowable. Now, as there cannot be two Ultimate Causes to be compared, knowledge at this point must be pronounced unattainable. It is hardly a burlesque to say that, by the same logic, if there were only one baby in the world it, too, would be unknowable to its own mother until a little brother or sister arrived to make comparisons possible.

To be known, again, according to Mr. Spen-

cer, "a thing must be conceived as having attributes."[1] But since such things as space, time, motion, God, have no attributes, they are forever unknowable, etc.

This definition of knowledge is, obviously, a torpedo which blows up many other things than religion. It shatters science. For what can science teach if time, space, motion, matter, the earth, the solar system, are all dismissed into the realms of the essentially and eternally unknowable? The same logic which proves that the soul can never know God proves a man cannot know himself. We are invited, in a word, to believe that there is no intermediate stage betwixt omniscience and universal and eternal ignorance. We can know nothing if we do not know everything.

A plain man will reply that Mr. Spencer's logic works both ways. We are assured that, in a metaphysical sense, we cannot "know" God; and in exactly the same sense we cannot know time, space, matter, motion, the solar system, the earth, or our own souls. But we

[1] First Principles, par. 13.

certainly know enough about these latter "unknowables" to use them as forces for the ends we choose. We build life and science on them; and life and science are realities. We win or miss happiness in their use; and happiness is not a dream. And if God is only "unknowable" in the sense in which *they* are, we may know enough of him to color life, and create a morality; enough for duty, for worship, for love. We can, under such conditions, cheerfully leave philosophers to wrangle over the metaphysics of knowledge.

But another line of thought has to be considered. It is certain that, somehow, a knowledge of that Unknown Power *does* exist—a knowledge sufficient to create a literature, to inspire a worship, to deflect the history of the world. The very starting point of agnosticism, indeed, the affirmation that the Cause of all things *exists,* is an assertion of knowledge. We cannot conceive of its existence except we know something about it. "The Unknowable," says Professor Gwatkin, "is the Unthinkable."

Herbert Spencer himself, in the name of ag-

nosticism, does a great deal of thinking about "the Unthinkable." This Unascertained Somewhat, or Something, behind all phenomena, he says, is "the Ultimate Cause of all things." Now, it is a postulate of the natural reason that there must be some relation betwixt a cause and its effect. Science itself is built on that postulate, and would perish if it were disproved.

This Unknowable Cause must, for one thing, possess power sufficient to produce the effects of which it is the cause. So the visible universe is a witness to the fact that the Unknowable is the Almighty. As the system of nature is a unit, it must be the product of a single cause. So the Unknowable, we are sure, is One.

Nature, too, is built on plan. All science proceeds on this assumption, and would be impossible if it were denied. Therefore it is certain that the Unknowable acts on method. The visible universe is stained to its minutest atom with the characteristics of design. It is penetrated through and through with thought, or we could not think about it. And how can

we have intelligibility in the result without intelligence in the cause?

The existence of general laws does not disprove design; they are an expression of it; they act as its servants. The "laws of nature" are only names for discovered uniformities and coexistences, and successions in phenomena. Even if these laws can be expressed in mechanical formulæ, the formulæ must have design behind them, and be its manifestations. Purpose in nature can only be denied by assuming with Comte that sequences, because they are regular, cannot have an intelligent cause. A disorderly system of nature would require a supernatural explanation, but an orderly system requires none. Professor Momerie's answer is final: "Purpose is none the less purpose because it is unchangeable. Knowledge is none the less knowledge because it is complete. Will is none the less will because it is unconquerable. Thought is none the less thought because it embraces the entire universe at once."

Now, design means a reasoned end, and the choice of fit means to reach that end. The

universe, in a word, is built on reason and shaped by purpose; and this proves the existence of reason and will in its Unknowable Cause. Reason and will, again, are the characteristics of personality, so the Unknowable is a Person. Even Haeckel, who resolves "the ultimate cause of all phenomena" into "an extremely attenuated, elastic, and light jelly," yet finds it necessary to endow this primal jelly with "sensation and will; though," he adds, on reflection, "naturally of the lowest grade." How this mysterious jelly from which the universe has sprung, can bestow on us "sensation and will" of a higher grade than it possesses itself is not clear; but sensation and will are certainly qualities of personality.

Thus, by a logic as absolute as the laws of thought themselves, we can read in the visible phenomena about us proofs that their Cause possesses infinite power and wisdom, that he—or it—chooses reasoned ends, and reaches them by fit means; that it is possessed of reason and will, and so is a Person.

Herbert Spencer, indeed, goes on to say, in

express terms, that "the Power manifested throughout the universe, distinguished as material, is the same Power which in ourselves wells up in the form of consciousness." If this be true, that Power must possess consciousness, or it lacks what it has given us. In his autobiography Spencer tells us there have been moments in his experience when, meditating on the amazing universe, he almost forgot his own metaphysics; and "the thought," he says, "that consciousness in some rudimentary form is omnipresent was borne in upon me." But consciousness is the sure mark of personality.

It may be added that what makes science possible is something more than the mere observed succession of phenomena. It is an element of what may be called trustworthiness in nature; a trustworthiness which runs back to a spiritual root. Why is yesterday a pledge of tomorrow? Science is built on the belief that what has happened once will, under the same conditions, infallibly happen again. To doubt this would be the wreck of all knowledge. Yet we have no guarantee for the great uniformi-

ties of nature, except in the assumption of Something behind nature, of whose fidelity—to borrow a moral term—they are the reflection.

The fidelities of physical nature are but the expression in physical terms of the fidelity of God. "A physical universe that is spiritually and morally trustworthy at the root," is, in the words of Professor Campbell Fraser, the one condition that makes physical science possible. So we get in physical science itself the revelation of a moral quality in the Cause behind all phenomena; and this, too, brings that Cause within the area of the Known.

At the point where the revelation of lower phenomena ends another line of revelation begins. Man is part of a system of things. He is "the last work" of the Ultimate Cause; he is its highest work. And if the character of the Ultimate Cause is revealed in the lower forms of nature, it must find still clearer manifestation in this, its loftiest form.

On what plan has the Ultimate Cause built the soul of man? By the witness of his own consciousness—and this, for him, is the ulti-

mate certainty—man knows that he is a free spirit. He moves among the forces of nature, with power to use them as his tools; to set them in new combinations, and produce results of which they themselves are incapable.

Moreover, the central thing in him is character, and character is more than the sum total of habits. It has a moral root. Conscience is its shaping force. Its culminating point is reached when will and conscience move together in unbroken rhythm.

Now, He who gave us these things must himself possess them; or He—or It—is lower than we are. Could That which is pitiless, endow us with pity? Could That which is itself loveless, set our natures in key with the music of love? The Ultimate Cause which has set that sublime thing we call conscience in human nature must itself be a moral agent, or it has bestowed on us a loftier gift than is to be found in its own nature.

If we reflect, again, we find there is wrought into the very fibers of man's nature a mystic, resistless, universal Something which makes it

answer to the call of goodness and recoils in the presence of great wickedness. In the lower forms of life there is the strange thing we call instinct. It is not reason. It reaches its end by processes swifter than reason knows. What science can explain that impulse which makes the bee build its hexagonal cell, or that teaches the bird, born under northern skies, to wing its swift, unguided flight southward, across trackless leagues of land and sea, to warmer climates?

And there is a mysterious force in us, linking us to the moral realm, which corresponds to that strange power in the lower animals. "Instinct," says Professor Gwatkin, "seems a deeper mystery than intellect, and may be more nearly connected with the final secret of life. It comes up from unknown depths, and somehow it comes up true." In exactly the same way certain moral instincts lie hid in man's soul that science cannot explain, but which exist, and, in Professor Gwatkin's words, "they come up true."

These are the central qualities of man's na-

ture—will, conscience, personality; the power to love; a cluster of imperishable moral instincts. Now, we are sure—unless reason betrays us—that the Cause which registers itself in these effects must have something that corresponds to them. How, then, can it be described as Unknown, still more as Unknowable?

And if the individual human life is a revelation of the nature of the Cause from which it springs, history—the life of the race—is yet another revelation. For we are sure it is an evolution; a process shaped by definite forces; an Epic moving toward a definite goal, which the Force behind history has chosen.

The revelation of the Cause behind all phenomena thus given by nature, and man, and history, is not perfect. It is the broken arc of a circle, a sheaf of splintered rays streaming through imperfect media, the twin, ascending curve of an uncompleted arch. The arch needs its keystone, the splintered light the clear medium, the broken circle the completing segment. And this, Christian faith declares, is to be

found in a written revelation, or in an Incarnation. But this is another line of thought, and need not be discussed here.

The facts we have recited are plain and unchallengeable; they constitute a chain of proofs in which there is not a broken link, that a revelation of the nature of the Ultimate Cause is given in the system of things about us. The logic proceeds on the supposition that the acts of an agent are an interpretation of character. We are sure of nothing if not of this. It is the law by which we judge each other. Does it fail when applied to God? What should we say of a science that asked us to believe that the spectroscope is a sure guide as far as the light of the smaller planets is concerned, but becomes unreliable when applied to the sun! Science knows no such breach in the continuity of law throughout the whole universe.

Now, the admission of the argument thus stated is fatal to agnosticism, for it proves that what it dismisses as the Unknowable is actually known. But the denial of the argument is

equally ruinous to the agnostic. It is certain that the Ultimate Cause has put in the human mind the instinct, the intellectual necessity, which compels that mind to read the nature of a cause in the character of its effects. That impulse is not born of chance; it is part of the system of things. And if it is not trustworthy, then it is planned to deceive! The Ultimate Cause has set a lie in the high places of the human intelligence, and given it empire over that intelligence.

But this, too, it must be insisted, is a revelation of the character of that Unascertained Something which is behind all phenomena, a revelation of its purpose, of the instruments it uses, of the end toward which it works. So that Unascertained Something comes within the area of our knowledge even on this theory, and by that very fact is a disproof of agnosticism. The Unknowable stands to this extent, at least, in the category of the Known.

But how dreadful is the knowledge! It is not Good, but Evil, that planned the world. And yet, strange to say, this Unknown Power

which has enacted a lie, and set it in authority over the human intellect, has also planted in man's nature the instinct which condemns lying and counts truth noble and sacred!

CHAPTER V

The Paradox of Agnosticism

The agnostic's position is as if Euclid worked out his demonstration complete, and then turned round of a sudden to dispute the Q.E.D. He is not reasoning, but simply refusing to reason.—Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God,* vol. i, p. 15.

The whole system of our belief as to the intrinsic reasonableness of conduct must fall without a hypothesis unverifiable by experience reconciling the individual with the Universal Reason, without a belief, in some form or other, that the moral order which we see imperfectly realized in this actual world is yet actually perfect. If we reject this belief, . . . the cosmos of duty is reduced to a chaos, and the prolonged effort of the human intellect to frame a perfect ideal of rational conduct is seen to have been predoomed to inevitable failure. —Sidgwick, *Method of Ethics.*

No attempt is made in these chapters to give more than the briefest hints of the case against agnosticism; hints which might easily be drawn out into a volume. But let this brief outline be summed up in a few sentences.

Agnosticism affirms an ignorance too spacious to be credible; an ignorance so wide, indeed, that, if it really exists, it destroys science

as well as religion. It casts an eclipse on this world as deep and black as on the next. It affirms that we know nothing, and can know nothing, not only of the Ultimate Cause of things, but of ourselves, and of the things we handle as tools every day.

Time, as we have seen, is one unknown; space is another; the solar system is a third; we ourselves are unknown to ourselves. A cobweb of metaphysics is spun that shuts out not only the sun at noonday, and the stars that burn in the nightly heavens, but even the familiar lights and landscapes of earth. Nothing but the foolish awe of unmeaning words—the cowardly dread of great names—forbids us to treat the whole philosophy of the unknown as a jest.

It must be remembered that Darwin himself was not a Spencerian. "Such parts of Spencer as I have read with care," he says, "impressed my mind with the idea of his inexhaustible wealth of suggestion, *but never convinced me!*"[1] And in that fine and powerful book,

[1] Life and Letters, vol. iii, p. 194.

Naturalism and Agnosticism, Professor Ward talks of Spencer's philosophy of agnosticism in language of great plainness. "His flimsy agnosticism," he says, "is only saved from being utter nonsense" by "the inconsistent implications and admissions of an idealistic character scattered through his writings."

How can anyone, indeed, contemplate without a smile the spectacle of a philosopher sitting in his study playing a few ingenious tricks with logic, and, on the authority of that performance, giving the lie to the raptures of all the saints, and the surest consciousness of the highest souls of the race! The answered prayers, the realized deliverances, the transfigured lives, the historic reformations of twenty centuries are dismissed as foolish dreams on the strength of a few passes of debating society logic.

And this is only part of the case. About nine tenths of agnostic philosophy it may be said that, true or false, we must forget it—we must agree to act as if it were untrue—the moment we step into practical life. We cannot

mention it in the open air, or try to act on it in the hurry of daily affairs, without making ourselves ridiculous. We must assume that we know force, motion, time, matter, and the solar system, or what becomes of science? How could we build a bridge, or run a railway, or sail a ship if we really knew nothing of these things? Even the most convinced agnostic must forget that time is unknowable when he has to catch a train.

Why do men so conveniently forget nine tenths of the philosophy of agnosticism and remember only the final and dreadful tenth—that which touches God and blots him out? May not the answer be that, in too many cases, at least, this philosophy fits in with that unconfessed bias of the human heart against God on which the Divine Word puts its finger and names it sin?

Agnosticism, on the moral side, is an easy creed. It might almost be described as a general agreement about God that nobody shall so much as ask what is his will concerning us. But on the intellectual side it is nothing better

than a metaphysical quibble, a humiliation to reason, an affront to common sense.

How profoundly this theory, if it at once captured the world and shaped it to its own evil image, would affect the ethics of the race is clear. It creates a totally new moral landscape. The measureless horizons of eternity are gone; there remains only the tiny curve of time. Its moral code strikes a baser key than even that of atheism. "There is no God! Let us act as if there were none!" The logic of that dreadful deduction, at least, is flawless. "There *is* a God, but he does not count. Let us act as if he did not exist." That is a conclusion that shocks reason as profoundly as it disquiets the conscience.

And let it be remembered that there is no such thing as an interregnum in morals. If divine law as a rule of conduct is canceled, something must step into its place; and it is melancholy to recall the attempts which have been made from the agnostic side to find a substitute for Christian ethics. "I will at least live like a gentleman," said Leslie Stephen,

when he had definitely renounced his Christian faith; and he acted on that fine resolve. But what about those who are not "gentlemen"? What about the wife-beater? What about the children of the slums, the savages bred in heathenism?

Christ can turn icicles into fire; and this is the miracle for which the world waits. It wants, in other words, a spiritual force which can transfigure the brute; which can regenerate wild tribes, and transmute into beauty the human waste of great cities. And the morality which consists in "living like a gentleman" will not work these miracles.

History is rich in what may be called literary substitutes for a divine law of conduct: the "utility" of John Stuart Mill, the "persistent instinct, innate or partly acquired," of Darwin, the test of "conduciveness to happiness" of Herbert Spencer, the "utterance of the public spirit of the race," of Leslie Stephen, the "effect of social rules enforced by penalty" of Professor Bain. And, as restraints of the terrific forces of sin, they are all mere cobwebs.

This, then, is the indictment of agnosticism. It is intellectually a self-refuted paradox. It escapes being dismissed as a jest only because nine tenths of its curious philosophy is forgotten. On the strength of a metaphysical refinement which proclaims the invalidity of all knowledge, and must therefore in practical life be forgotten, the great procession of witnesses for God—conscience within and nature without, the written Word, the signature of religion on history, the divine figure of Christ—all are dismissed as dreams. God himself becomes an infinite, eternal, and omnipotent Irrelevancy in his own universe.

Oh, daring, dreadful, monstrous creed! And we are asked to accept it as the result of an analysis of knowledge which, the moment practical affairs are touched, even the agnostic himself must dismiss as untrue. What other creed requires us to believe so much, and offers us so little justification for that belief?

Theism, it may be frankly admitted, has its difficulties—difficulties born of the mystery inevitable when the finite mind strives to conceive

the Infinite. But where theism has difficulties its alternatives have incredibilities, not to say impossibilities. Christian theism, moreover, is accredited by its ethics. It is the one effective system of morals that human history knows. Every sane man must *wish* it to be true. But both atheism and agnosticism are discredited by their morality, or, rather, by their want of morality. If they conquered the world, it would only be to destroy it. An impossible creed, in each case, is linked to an intolerable morality; and we may say of each that, wherever the truth lies, it cannot be *here!*

"One should hesitate," says a French wit, "in giving one's opinion on philosophy when we differ from the sages, and on religion when we differ from the saints." But in this debate nearly all the sages, and absolutely all the saints, are on the side of Christianity! It is a creed which, unless perverted, certainly makes for goodness. It keeps the golden chain of the saints unbroken. Under every sky today, it is creating pure lives and inspiring happy deaths. "Our Father, which art in heaven": this is the

creed that every good mother finds it sweet to teach her child. It is a theology which is born of love, and creates love. Its roots run down to the heart. Its evidences are writ plain on the very face of the universe. They are attested by history. They are verified afresh in human experience with every new day.

Oh blessed faith! And, hidden under many disguises, are its inevitable alternatives: the black, tremendous negation of atheism, pantheism, which denies personality to man and holiness to God, or the self-created and all-including blindness of agnosticism. And betwixt these alternatives, as between eternal opposites, the human soul stands whipped by the sharp necessity of action into choice.

For these rival creeds are not abstract theories, as trivial as the colored balls of a juggler, and, like them, the mere sport of ingenious fingers. Each is a formula of conduct. Each shapes life. Each is a chart by which the ship must sail—*is* sailing—toward an unseen port. Is there, for the sane mind, room for doubt as to which chart should be taken?

BOOK II

THE ALTERNATIVES TO BELIEF IN CHRIST

PART I

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH ABOUT CHRIST

CHAPTER I

The Place of Christ in the Christian Creed

The religion of Christ goes mysteriously back to his person. —Keim.

The historical fact of Christ, interpreted by faith, is the central secret of the New Testament. It is . . . a great new Act of God, which constitutes a new world.—Cairns, *Christianity in the Modern World,* p. 149.

The faith of Christendom finds its center not in a book, or a creed, or a philosophy, not in an ethical code, or a many-centuried institution, but in a Person. It stands or falls with the single figure of Jesus Christ; and it is worth while to put, in untheological language, the general Christian faith about Christ, taking what is common to all varieties of Christian belief. For if the differences of the Christian churches are strange and tragical, their agreements are fundamental and eternal.

Jesus Christ, the general faith of Christendom affirms, is not a far-off figure on the hori-

zon of history. He is not a creed in an Eastern gown, a cluster of dogmas or of legends, which have somehow gathered round a tiny kernel of truth—nay, which have no kernel of fact at their heart, but have crystallized round a mere vacuum. He is a living Person, touching men today with living hands, and searching the depths of men's personality with living force. He trod the earth's soil once, two thousand years ago; he shapes its life today.

Whether Christ once existed might be treated as a question of documents and dates, a puzzle in archæology, a debate to be settled by a jury of antiquarians. Christian faith affirms the historic fact, but it affirms, too, the living fact that Christ exists today! This is the supreme truth for which Christianity stands. So the debate about Christ is to be waged not merely in the forum of history but of consciousness. And at this point an appeal might well be made to Coleridge's test. "Do not talk to me," said Coleridge, "of the evidences of Christianity. Try it. It has been eighteen hundred years in existence, and no-

body who has tried it on its own terms has ever challenged it as a failure."

But if the question has to be argued as one of history, then the general faith of Christendom declares that Jesus Christ is a Person as real as Alexander or Cæsar, with a volume of evidence as to his character and acts as much surer than theirs as his impress on the world is infinitely deeper and more enduring. He lived, taught, suffered, died, and rose from the dead, exactly as described in the New Testament. And it is not enough to say that the four Gospels are true narratives; it is inadequate to say, even, that the whole New Testament is Christ's biography. All history since is his biography.

The Gospels give the record of the few years of his earthly life, and of his teaching, or of as much of it as his immediate disciples could comprehend. The other books of the New Testament show his impress on the generation that immediately followed. The history of the civilized world since is a record of the effect his life has produced on the race.

The Christian Church holds Christ to be the one sufficient ethical teacher that mankind knows, and after twenty centuries the race still sits at his feet. It has found nothing higher; it can imagine nothing higher. Interpreted by human philosophy, morality knows only two stages: the earliest and rudest, the morality of definite rules; later—and loftier—comes the morality of principles. But Christ lifts our ethics up to a height beyond human philosophy. He teaches a morality which is nothing else than love in action. Rules, Principles, Love—so the scheme of morals is made complete. But it is Christ who completes it.

And Christ gives us this new morality not drawn out in a code, but embodied in human terms, and linked to a victorious spiritual energy. He is the supreme Example, as well as the one authoritative Teacher of the race. We judge him today by the new conscience he has himself created, and so miss one half of his unique greatness. Only when he is tried by the ethical standards of his own generation can his separateness as a moral Teacher be realized.

But to say that Christ is the Teacher of the race, the one supreme expression of goodness it knows, is insufficient. Christ cannot be classed with men. He does not sit side by side with even Plato or Marcus Aurelius. He is the Eternal Word made flesh: the Eternal Word dwelling among men, and full of grace and truth. His birth was an incarnation. His life is not an ascent—the crest of a wave of human aspiration. It is a descent. We see, in it, God stooping from heaven, not the daring spiritual genius of man climbing to heaven. Christ touches us with a kinsman's hands, tender as none others ever were, but the hands are those that made us.

Christ, in brief, is more than a Teacher about God. He *is* God: God breaking out of the spiritual realm, descending from the awful height of his greatness, to rescue the souls he has made from overwhelming peril; God taking upon himself human nature, that he may redeem it.

So we do not come to Christ for dreams and guesses about the First Cause of things. His

life is the supreme self-manifestation of the personal God. "He that hath seen me"—it is his own witness—"hath seen the Father."

And if the birth of Jesus Christ was an incarnation, his death was more than a martyrdom. It was in some mysterious way an expiation, "a sacrifice for our sins," to use the words of Scripture; a sacrifice with mystery above it, mystery beneath it, mystery about it; mystery which no theology can measure or express.

Let there be put side by side Socrates taking the cup of hemlock, with a touch of something like gaiety, and Christ taking his cup, with sweat of blood and mystery of anguish. Plainly, in Christ's case there is an element no ordinary human death knows: there are heights to which our poor thoughts may not climb, and depths for which we have no plummet. But it is to Gethsemane, not to Athens, the race turns in search of deliverance. Socrates, the Greek, has never touched the world's conscience and imagination as Christ, the Jew, has touched it.

On the human side, as myriads know experimentally, from the death of Christ streams

a spiritual energy which transfigures the soul surrendered to its influence. And in some dim, mysterious way, beyond the range of our thoughts, we are able to see that on the divine side his death was an event which—if only by the effect which, as the overwhelming manifestation of God's love, it produces on the human soul—makes forgiveness possible. But from all human speculations we come back to the plain words of Scripture for the meaning of Christ's death—words overwhelming in their significance when we remember their subject is the Eternal Son of God: "HE DIED FOR US."

What heights and depths are hidden in those four words the human mind cannot guess. And this not because God has his own secrets, and keeps them, but because here is a deep beyond our sounding. Yet on the fact thus shrouded in mystery, Christian faith—though it must be confessed with much dimness and awe—rests with unshakable confidence, remembering Pascal's great saying: "The highest act of reason is to recognize that there are things beyond its range."

And if Christ died as a sacrifice for our sins, he rose again from the dead in sign of victory over sin, and as pledge of final deliverance from both sin and death for every soul that accepts him.

Christ, in a word, is accepted, not merely as a Teacher, an Example; He is a Saviour. He offers us, not a speculation, but a gospel; not a philosophy, but a deliverance. He puts into our hands, it is true, a code of perfect ethics; but he does vastly more. He touches our spirits with a transfiguring moral energy. He not only announces the kingdom of God; he creates it. The words of the New Testament are countersigned by the whole spiritual experience of the race: "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation."

Christianity, we repeat, is not a philosophy, but it *has* a philosophy, sublime in its height and depth. Are we challenged to say what is its innermost meaning? On the Christian reading, God is building, afresh, into order and beauty, a wrecked spiritual universe. It must, by the necessity of things, be shaped by moral

forces. It is being built for love's ends, on love's methods, and by love's energies. It is described in the words of Scripture as "the kingdom of his dear Son"; and, being translated into it, we become its subjects, live by its laws, dwell in its security, and in the climax of God's plans shall share its splendor.

Does all this seem a tale incredible, a rose-colored myth, a dream of dead and forgotten poets, beautiful, no doubt, but vain as it is beautiful? There are two things, it may be replied, which make the Christian creed, with its rainbow of mysterious hopes, most credible.

One is the character of God. "Nothing," says Tertullian, "is so worthy of God as our salvation." We have only to reflect, indeed, that if God is, in terms of morals, and on the scale of his nature, what he expects us to be in the scale of ours, then this vast and mysterious redemption is not only credible, it is inevitable. It is exactly what God would do, ought to do, must have done.

For let us imagine that in the palm of a mother's hand lay the infinite wealth of God;

that to the tenderness of a human mother's heart were linked the wisdom and the omnipotence of God. What son would then doubt the possibility of there coming into his life a redemption as rich in grace, as dazzling in scale as that depicted in the Gospels? What hope would be too great, what expectation too daring, for him to cherish? A mother's love, linked to omnipotence, would make everything possible.

Now, we are sure that with the infinite God the power and wisdom needed for redemption are present. And shall we dare to think that at the sublime point of love God is less than his creatures? "The power that produced Jesus must at least be equal to Jesus." That is sound logic, though it has Unitarian theology behind it; and it is a logic which runs far. It makes all tenderness of every human love one of the credentials of Christianity.

The root of all skepticism as to the Christian scheme—the master doubt, hidden under a thousand disguises—is the thought that it is "too good to be true." "Would that it were

true!" the human soul sighs. "Would that it could be proved beyond all reach of doubt!"

But, somehow, this conception of a redemption wrought out by the love of God—love that stoops to us from heights so great to a depth so low, love that reaches its end through suffering—actually exists. Who invented or imagined it? "Not God," says doubt; "it is beyond his range"—for this is what "it is too good to be true" means—"it awoke in some dreaming human brain." And so we are asked to believe this utterly incredible thing—that a human dream is greater than any divine reality can be. Christianity is not too good for man to imagine or invent; but it is too good for God to execute!

Do our thoughts, it may be asked in reply, outrun those of God's in any other realm? Do we imagine better things than he has created, or can create, in the chambers of the material universe? Why should our dreams transcend God's realities in the loftiest realm when they cannot do it in the lowest? "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than

your thoughts." This is God's own message to us; it is certainly true everywhere in the material universe; why should it not be true in the spiritual realm? And if it *is* true, then doubt about Christianity—doubt based on its too magnificent reading of divine grace, and of human hope—is absurd.

Perhaps the single new weapon Christian polemics in this generation has gained is that yielded by the larger scale, the infinitely heightened glory, of the physical world, as interpreted by modern science. Early generations saw only the outposts of the innumerable armies of the skies. We can at least guess, as they could not, the height of the heavens, the scale of God's hosts. Moreover, the homely earth itself, under the lens of science, gleams with mysterious splendor. A speck of radium hides marvels in its tiny curve, more arresting to the imagination than Saturn with its girdle of fire, or Jupiter with its cohort of flying moons. We have learned to track matter back to the point where it ceases to be matter, and by some strange transition becomes Force.

So the pebble on the seashore, flung up by the last wave, as science has learned to read it, is a starry universe with a whole planetary system in each atom, its atom-planets divided from each other and from their suns by immensities of space relatively as great as the heavens themselves, and repeating incessantly the pageantry of sunset and dawn. What may be called the astronomy of dust is as dazzling as the astronomy of the nightly skies.

A God "doing wonders" in every realm the mind can read or the senses discern—this is the lesson we are learning afresh, and with deeper meaning with every sunrise. And in that highest realm, where God himself dwells, in the order of spiritual existence and in those qualities which belong to his own nature—in love and righteousness—shall we dare to imagine that God suddenly shrinks in scale, and becomes commonplace? Do his thoughts in those great heights move in smaller curves than those the planets know? The incarnation and the cross, tried by the one test of their wonder, are the fitting and transcendent climax to the tran-

scendent scale of God's lower works, as we are beginning, at last, to discern it.

This, the scale on which, in every other realm, God plans and works, is the second fact that makes redemption, as Christian faith conceives it, credible. The wonder of the physical universe, the wonder of its extent, its laws, its energies, give us, so to speak, the curve of the ellipse. With this majesty of conception God works in the realm of matter. When he passes into the kingdom of love, will anyone ask us to believe that he becomes commonplace? Is it credible that God has narrower thoughts and works on a meaner scale of splendor in the spiritual realm than in unconscious matter?

For some the miracles ascribed to Christ seem incredibilities that make the whole story suspect. They are in quarrel with natural order. But such miracles, it should be remembered, are exactly in the key of Christ's history as Christian faith reads it. "If one," says Dr. Storrs, "walks along the path, over many lands through darkened centuries which Christianity has brightened with glowing lights, and on

which she has strewn astonishing victories, he can hardly be amazed when he finds at the outset the deaf hearing, the blind seeing, the dumb made to speak, and the poor hearing the word of life. It will be to him harmonious as music, though loftier than the shining suns, to see the Lord of this religion arising from the grave and ascending in illustrious triumph to heaven!"

The manner in which Christianity has affected the world corresponds to this great creed. It is a scheme, it may be admitted, so incredible in its grace that all our theologies are too small for it. Our hymns are not sweet enough for it. It is fairer than our dreams; it rises above our most daring hopes. Faith itself apprehends it with a slowness so tragical, and misapprehends it with a diligence so evil, that the wonder is it has not perished, killed by the narrowness and the quarrels of its professed adherents. If it were not divine, it must have died.

But it lives! It is a creed that creates saints. Men in every age have died for it.

Persecution has striven in vain to kill it. It does what no other creed known to history has done: it works spiritual miracles. In every land where its tale is told, and with every new sun that dawns, drunkards may be found whom it has made sober, thieves whom it has taught to be honest, harlots whom it has lifted up to chastity, selfish men who, touched by its breath, live by the great law of self-sacrifice. It is the root whence blossom infinite heroisms and charities.

It is of Jesus Christ that the writer of Ecce Homo says: "All human sorrows hide in his wounds; all human self-denials lean on his cross." That is but a picturesque way of saying—what is a commonplace—that all that is purest and strongest and sweetest in human life today takes its inspiration from Jesus Christ.

To this one of the most famous of living scientists adds his testimony: "At the foot of the cross," says Sir Oliver Lodge, "there has been a perennial experience of relief and renovation."

If a witness of another race is needed, let those fine and oft-quoted words of Heine be recalled: "How great a drama is the Passion of Christ! And how finely it is justified by the prophecies of the Old Testament! It was inevitable; it was the red seal of faith; testamentum. . . . How gracious a figure is that of the Man-God! Moses loved his people with touching affection; he cared for that people's future as a mother would. But Christ loved all humanity; that Sun sent the flames of its benevolent rays over all the world. His words are a balm for all the wounds this world can inflict, and the blood that was shed at Golgotha became a healing stream for all that suffer. . . . The white marble gods of the Greeks were spattered with this blood, and they sickened with inward terror, and could never more regain their health."

CHAPTER II

The First Argument for Christian Faith: A Divine Character

The simple record of three short years of Christ's active life has done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers, and all the exhortations of moralists.—Lecky, *History of Morality,* vol. ii, p. 88.

What is the evidence on which this great faith rests? Putting aside all secondary and incidental arguments, it may be said with confidence that the whole cause of Christian faith may be risked on two facts: the fact of a divine Person and the fact of a divine history. The fact, that is, of Christ, and the fact of Christianity.

In a deep and most true sense, Jesus Christ proves himself. He who sees Mount Everest does not need the poor argument of the foot rule to persuade him that the sky-piercing peak, with its white crown of dazzling snows, actually exists. And to look at Jesus Christ with

uncolored vision is to believe in him. He is like no other figure on the world's stage. Uncounted hosts of human beings—men of the loftiest intellect side by side with men of the most lowly heart and the most saintly life—have what may be scientifically described as a personal verification of the existence and of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

They are conscious of being saved by him. They feel, every moment, the pulse of a life that beats direct from him. They know him to be the living root from which all that is best in their nature springs. Christ's great parable of the vine and the branch is the exact transcript of their experience. For them there is no rebuke for sin like his purity, no comfort for sorrow like his gentleness, no argument for hope like the vision of his face. His name, for them, is an open window into the very heart of God. His words are the supreme interpretation of duty.

By some strange compulsion the very enemies of Christ become his witnesses. "Never man spake like this man," was the testimony of

the rude soldiers sent to arrest him; and that witness is repeated afresh by every new generation of skeptics. Unbelief, as little as belief, would take the greatest of the world's poets and thinkers, and set them, as equals, side by side with Jesus of Nazareth.

"It is no use," says Mr. Campbell in that strange book, The New Theology—a book which might be described as metaphysical fog shot through with gleams of piercing light—"It is no use trying to place Jesus in a row along with other religious masters. He is first and the rest nowhere; we have no category for him."

There is a quality in the words of Christ, a power to reach the human conscience, which no poet or philosopher or scientist ever possessed. He talks the language which the human soul instinctively recognizes to be divine. He interprets himself to us in strange, brief, deathless phrases which on any other lips would sound extravagant to the point of lunacy, but which on his lips seem natural.

"*I am,*" he says, "*the light of the world.*"

Imagine Plato saying that, or Epictetus, or John Stuart Mill! But on Christ's lips the words shock nobody. They seem self-evident. They are a self-verifying revelation, with profoundest meaning in every syllable. Exactly as the light shuts up in its white purity the whole scale of color—the beauty of all flowers, the purple of far-off hills, the rainbow glories of sky and sea and earth—so the character of Jesus Christ is found to contain the elements of all goodness. Nay, exactly like the light, it possesses an energy which creates beauty in others.

As every hint of grace in sky, or flower, or human face is born of the light, and lives by the light, so all that is lofty, or pure, or gentle in the world's life today can be traced, directly or indirectly, to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and to the spiritual energy that streams from him.

"I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Here is another of the deep, bewildering sayings of Christ. What merely human lips could speak such words

without kindling the laughter of the world! In the mouth of a Galilean peasant they sound like the wildest extravagance. But looked back upon across twenty centuries, we see that these words are an exact prophetic forecast of human history, fulfilled afresh with every day that dawns. God never hurries. Centuries with him are but as moments. But as seen in the perspective of history, how clear it is that, from the moment he hung on the cross, Christ, by some deep, mysterious attraction, has been drawing all men unto Himself. All the currents of the living world are flowing Christward, and must flow.

Or take another of the profound utterances of Christ, words that overleap the boundaries of time, and have in them the vibrations of eternity: "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, . . . he shall testify of me. . . . If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. . . . He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

No one can read these words without feeling how profound a note they strike. Here is one who speaks as master of the spiritual world. His authority runs into those dim regions which lie beyond death. He declares that from beyond the grave, with forces moving at his bidding, and working to glorify him, he will touch and shape the world he has left. These are not accents that fit human speech. But they are natural on Christ's lips; and once more the experience of twenty centuries attests their fulfillment. His words as reported by his disciples have shaken thrones. They have outlasted kingdoms and dynasties.

If a proof is wanted of the transcendent force that dwells in Jesus Christ, we find it in the impression he made on the men about him. He took a handful of Jewish fishermen, with the ignorance of their day, the narrowness of their race, and the prejudices native to their blood. They were bits of very common clay, and he touched them only for three brief years. To say they only half understood his words is quite insufficient; they visibly and grossly mis-

apprehended them. And they witnessed what, to human eyes, must have seemed the shame and defeat of his death. This, surely, was enough to wreck faith!

Yet the touch of Christ's hands made these men not only saints—such saints as the world to that hour had never seen—it made them the world's teachers. Not Plato talked like John, or Socrates like Paul. What philosopher or ethical teacher, up to the present moment, indeed, has spoken with the accents of these men who caught their message from Christ's lips?

No one can pretend that it was by virtue of any endowment of natural genius these Galilean peasants rose to a point so high. They took their impulse from Christ. His Spirit, as he had promised, wrought in them when he himself had left the earth; and we can watch across two thousand years, and see, like crystals forming in some chemical solution, the faith of the early church in Christ taking shape.

The process is clear, definite, inevitable; an evolution as plain as anything known to natural science, but it is an evolution shaped by forces

that stream from the spiritual world. The area, in time, of Christ's ministry is very brief, only three crowded years; but upon that little span of time beats, perhaps, a fiercer light than upon any other equal tract of human history. And, watching the impression made by Christ on those about him, we see, first, the mere wonder awakened by the miracles, the vague sense kindled of Something great, half understood, mysterious. This sense grows, but it is perplexed by the shock to all the traditional expectations of a Messiah. Guesses as to who Christ is run through the land. All men wonder, and the wonder spreads to the court, to the temple, as well as to the streets of the city, and the villages of Galilee.

The inner circle round Christ shares that wonder; but faith there, at a fit moment, is brought to a climax by Christ's challenge to Peter—"Whom do *ye* say that I am?" Peter, when first brought to Christ by his brother Andrew, had been told, "We have found the Messias, . . . the Christ," and no doubt he was prepared to see in Jesus the Messiah of

Jewish expectation. But that expectation had been wrecked. Now, Peter has reached a loftier reading of the truth, and so comes his historic confession: *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

The note here is personal, sure, lofty. In these memorable syllables faith makes its leap, its spring on to the high levels of Christian truth. And Christ seals the act with the great words: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." On the truth of this confession Christ declares he will build his church.

But Peter can keep on those great heights only for a step; with almost the next breath he is rebuking "the Son of the living God," and undertaking to correct his plans! During Christ's earthly ministry, indeed, his disciples never reached higher than that point of fitful, half-incredulous belief. "I have many things to say unto you," said Christ before he left them; "but hitherto ye have not been able to receive them; neither yet can ye understand them."

Then came the shock of what seemed the final disaster and shame of the cross, a shock that threatened the whole wreck of faith. And the very hour of that wreck, while they are staggering under its shock, there broke in on the disciples the amazement of the resurrection and the wonder of the risen Christ. He is seen at last in his true glory; all that he has taught about himself falls into order; it kindles into clearness. We can discern, in the apostles, the awakening vision of sublime truths, the thrill of dawning intuitions, of great forces and emotions, in a word, trembling into a religion.

It is not yet a theology, though a theology is latent in it, and must soon come; but in both the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles we can see the mind of the new-born church adjusting itself to a world of new ideas. A complete new reading of the universe has broken in upon it. Not Columbus, when he caught, through the dark night, the gleam of light that streamed from the New World he was seeking, knew such wonder. Keats, in a famous sonnet, has

pictured the emotions of "stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes," he

> Stared at the Pacific—and all his men
> Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
> Silent upon a peak in Darien.

The famous Spaniard had an unknown, uncharted ocean spread at his feet, on which no European ship had ever sailed. But the early church had a landscape nobler and fairer spread before it, a universe of new spiritual conceptions. And the key to it all was *the realized personality of Christ.*

So when the new theology comes it is a Christology. The sense in the infant church is not that some new truth has been discovered, but, as Cairns puts it in his Christianity in the Modern World, that "some new and amazing thing has *happened.*" The mind of the early church is preoccupied not with the miracles of Christ or with his parables, or with the Sermon on the Mount, but with the personality of Christ himself. The new theology, it may be repeated, is a Christology. The master truth for them is that "God was in Christ"; God, not

a far-off and dreadful Being to be sought, but a redeeming Saviour, seeking them. Kepler, when in a high mood of feeling, explained his science by saying, "I am thinking God's thoughts after him," and the whole theology of the early church consisted in thinking Christ's thoughts after him.

Great human discoveries, while they seem to exalt, in a sense, dwarf their discoverers. Newton discovered the law of gravitation, and so won fame; but, set against the truth he discovered, how tiny is his scale! Darwin built with patient industry the magnificent formula of evolution, and in our exaggerated fashion we call his name "immortal." But how much less is the discoverer than the thing discovered! Who can imagine Newton saying, "I am the law of gravitation," or Darwin offering himself to the world as being in his own person the formula of evolution!

Now, Christ reveals great truths; but they center in him; they have no existence apart from him. "I *am* the truth," he says; and this is exactly the vision the early church has

of him. The proof of this is found in the new accent in which they speak of him. Peter's "leap of faith" in the confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," is an impulse exhausted almost at a breath; it is a sudden dazzling vision of truth, on which at the next moment falls an eclipse.

Compare this with the majestic verses with which John's Gospel opens. There is a sound in the very syllables as of the tread of some victorious host: "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD. THE SAME WAS IN THE BEGINNING WITH GOD. ALL THINGS WERE MADE BY HIM; AND WITHOUT HIM WAS NOT ANYTHING MADE THAT WAS MADE." Peter's confession is a leap, and a stumble; John walks on the great heights of faith with surest step.

And the reading of Christ's nature which we thus see taking possession of the consciousness of the early church, and kindling it to rapture and power, is still the central truth of Christianity. This is the faith that has remade the world. Many are willing to sit at the feet of

Christ as a Teacher, but they refuse to adore him as a Saviour. They are trying the melancholy experiment of taking the spiritual ideas of Christ and rejecting his divine Personality. But the divorce is impossible. It would be fatal if it were possible.

Yes: in all the later writings of the New Testament we can see the great conception of Christian faith taking conscious shape, and coming to its kingdom in the hearts of the first generation of Christ's followers. In this way the Spirit of Christ so interpreted Christ to his followers, and enlarged their power to receive him, that they became at last saints of a type unknown in history, martyrs whose heroism is a kindling memory, teachers at whose feet each generation in turn is willing to sit.

And Christ has still this strange power to transform men; a power which centuries, as they pass, leave unexhausted. Men are skeptical as to the miracles Christ wrought in the flesh two thousand years ago, but the miracles he works today in the enduring field of human character are beyond challenge. Suppose it be

denied that he turned water into wine at Cana. It is historically certain that he turned a handful of Galilean peasants into the world's teachers. He transformed Saul the persecutor into Paul the saint. And he still keeps the key of all hearts; he puts his stamp on each generation in turn.

It is curious to note how each fresh student finds some independent argument for worshiping Christ, something different from what other men see, and yet equally authoritative. A skeptic like Theodore Parker is lost in wonder at the human greatness of Christ: "The manliest of men, humane as a woman, pious and hopeful as a prayer, brave as man's most daring thought. He has led the world in morals and religion for eighteen centuries because he was the manliest man in it, hence the most divine." A saint like Phillips Brooks is most impressed by the sinlessness of Christ: "He is the one sinless Man in history, and even if he had done nothing else for our salvation, this makes him the most saving Fact that the world ever saw."

A philosophic historian like Seeley declares that "Christ is surely the most sublime image offered to human imagination"; but the secret of his sublimity lies in the wedlock of measureless power with inexpressible gentleness. This, says Seeley, "is the masterpiece of Christ." It is "a sublime moral miracle superinduced upon a physical one."

A theologian such as Bushnell, on the other hand, finds the surest mark of Christ's divinity in the strange union of perfect lowliness of spirit with the most solemn claims to supernatural authority. "I," says Christ, "am meek and lowly of heart," and no one doubts what may be called his infinite humility. Yet what voice that ever fell upon human ears uttered claims so transcendent! He claims to be the very root of our life: *"I am the vine, ye are the branches."* He offers himself to us as the one link betwixt the human race and God: *"No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* He lays his hands on the sweetest relationships of human life, and claims the right to come before them all: *"He that loveth*

father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."

Now, the world is swift to discover conceit and pitiless to scourge it. On any other lips such words would kindle universal laughter. But on Christ's lips they seem natural; and on this single point Bushnell challenges unbelief. "Come now all ye that tell us in your wisdom of the mere natural humanity of Jesus, select your best and wisest character; take the range, if you will, of all the great philosophers and saints, and choose out one that is most competent; or, if perchance, some one of you may imagine that he is himself upon a level with Jesus (as we hear that some of you do), let him come forward in this trial and say: 'Follow *me*.' 'Be worthy of *me*.' '*I* am the light of the world.' 'Ye are from beneath, *I* am from above.' 'Behold a greater than Solomon is here.' Take on all these transcendent assumptions, and see how your glory will be sifted out of you by the detective gaze, and darkened by the contempt, of mankind! Why not? Is not the challenge fair? Do you not tell us that you

can say as divine things as he? Give us this one experiment, and see if it does not prove to you a truth that is of some consequence, namely, that you are a man, and that Christ Jesus is—more."

CHAPTER III

The Second Argument for Christian Faith: A Divine History

If Christ had not been what he was, and stood where he did, could anything in history be as it had been or as it is? Is there any person necessary in the same sense as he is to the higher history of man? May we not speak of him as the keystone of the arch which spans the gulf of time? But can we conceive that the keystone came there by accident, or otherwise than by the hand which built the bridge, which opened the chasm, and determined the course of the river that flows beneath?—Fairbairn, *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 567.

But let the other fact which reinforces Christian faith—the Christian system itself—be considered. It is not a dream, an illusion, but a fact—visible, tangible, tremendous. This far-off, untaught Jew, as those who deny his divinity must describe him, is the Founder, the Lawgiver, the Judge of a new and divine society; and this society is not like the Atlantis of Plato, or the Utopia of Sir Thomas More, a dream; it is not like the heavenly city, the New

Jerusalem which John saw in a vision, a far-off prophecy. It exists in history. It is part of the living world. No revolution can shake its deep foundations. Its citizens outnumber those of any earthly empire that can be named. It has survived the hates, the persecutions, the betrayals and corruptions of twenty centuries. No human name is inscribed on its gates; no human genius has left its print on its constitution. It is the creation of Jesus Christ. And for Christian faith, at least, what is this but to say that, like the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem John saw, it has "descended out of heaven from God"?

But putting this aside, it is certainly true that today, two thousand years after its Founder died a death of shame, Christianity is literally the biggest fact in the world. No other single force that can be named touches so many lives, or influences so profoundly the course of history. History, indeed, is unintelligible without it.

What may be called its external scale—its organized churches, its innumerable temples,

its hymns, its charities, the music of its unceasing worship, the saintly lives it creates, the great missionary societies it maintains, its impress on literature, on politics—all this is nothing less than wonderful. If anyone looks round on the civilized order of the world, and asks whose image and superscription does it bear—no matter how dimly—only one answer is possible. It were as easy to untwist the light, destroy half the primary colors and leave the color scheme of nature unaffected as to take out of the literature, the politics, the art, the domestic life of the world what Christ gives to them and leave them undestroyed.

Christianity, in brief, is to the daily life of the world what gravitation is in the kingdom of matter, a force to be reckoned with everywhere. It affects every interest as gravitation affects every atom. Its theology, indeed, is still in the stage of conflict; but its moral ideals, running in advance of its doctrines, have captured the world. Men who cannot accept the Christian creed yet acknowledge the authority and supremacy of Christian ethics.

Here, then, is a fact which has to be explained. It has been produced, let us say for the sake of argument, by some unknown Cause. Now, on scientific grounds, we are sure that an effect so stupendous in its range, and that persists through so many centuries, must have a Force behind it equal to it in scale. To say that the cause is a delusion, born in the cradle of some dreaming and undisciplined brain, is absurd. Realities are not born of delusions. To take a dozen fishermen and tentmakers, two thousand years distant, with a bundle of self-generated superstitions, and offer *them* as an explanation of Christianity, is like offering a box of matches as the force which has lit the flame of Jupiter.

What human genius is capable of in statesmanship, in literature, in philosophical speculation, in war, is known and can be measured. We have only to take the great figures that from time to time appear on the world's stage —Plato in philosophy, Alexander in war, Cæsar in the arts of government—to get the curve which limits what is possible to human genius.

But, for one thing, there is no Plato or Alexander or Cæsar in Christian history to explain it. And can anyone imagine that if all the poets and metaphysicians, all the soldiers and statesmen of all the ages—all the great names of history, in a word, put together—had been in the service of Christianity, this would be a sufficient explanation of the scale to which it has grown, the persistency with which it endures, and the place it fills in the lives of men?

This far-off Jew alone has wrought this miracle; and all the wonders, real or alleged, described in the four Gospels, are trivial compared with the miracle of contemporaneous Christianity itself. It belongs to an order of things beyond the power of human genius to imagine or accomplish.

We are sure on scientific grounds, again, that the force behind Christianity, which explains its existence, must be like it in character as well as equal to it in scale. If it is idle to offer a delusion as the cause which explains Christianity, it is even more absurd to offer a fraud.

Christianity, on any theory as to its origin, is a force making for truth, for righteousness, for purity; and such a force is not generated in the bosom of a lie. The moral energy which is slowly but visibly reshaping the civilization of the world, which has created a new conscience in the race, and is calling into existence new ideals of beneficence and purity and goodness, must flow from some pure and divine source.

But, it may be asked, may not the same thing, in a lesser degree at least, be said of the other religions of the world—of Mohammedanism, of Buddhism, etc.?

It may be gladly admitted that there are strange anticipations of Christ's teaching in other and older books: in the Talmud, in the sacred writings of Buddhism, or of Confucius; though it is not quite true that the Sermon on the Mount is, in Professor Clifford's words, "just Rabbi Hillel recast." There are reflections of Christ's teaching in later books, such as the Koran. It might be a sufficient reply to ask that the New Testament as a whole should

be compared with the sacred writings of other religions as a whole, and to remember that Professor Max Müller, when he published the Sacred Books of the East, in England, explained that there were whole sections that he dared not publish in English, lest he should lay himself open to a criminal prosecution. Yet it may be gladly acknowledged that—

> The prophets of the elder day,
> The slant-eyed sages of Cathay,
> Read not the riddle all amiss
> Of higher life evolved from this.

These starry gleams in the dark literature of earlier ages are broken rays of the divine light, but Christ is the sunrise. His teaching does not contradict what is best in the writings of the sages and teachers of heathenism. It moves on the line of their best, and runs into realms to which they never come. Christ, in a word,

> Gathers in one sheaf complete,
> The scattered blades of God's own wheat.

But Christ does more than merely add new realms to the tiny area of truth the race possessed. He has opened the gates into a new

universe. He has taught us that the cross on which the Sinless One died for the sinful is the supreme interpretation of God. This is more than a revelation; it is a revolution.

The Sermon on the Mount is to the best things in heathen literature what the planet Jupiter is to a street lamp. Yet if the Sermon on the Mount were all that Christ had given us, he would only be a better sort of Plato, an Epictetus with a finer accent. Christ, it must be repeated, brings to the race not a new ethical system, but a new and supreme ethical energy. The system he founded not only proclaims the doctrine of that central miracle of the spiritual universe—the new birth; it actually works that miracle; does it perennially; does it with each new day in the experience of multitudes.

Mohammedanism is one of the three great monotheistic religions of the earth; and the one effective truth it possesses, the doctrine that God is One, is borrowed from the Bible. Hinduism, again, shows how deep and indestructible an element in human nature religion is. Whoever made man drew the plan of his nature

on the lines of religion; and Hinduism, like every other form of heathenism, is a melancholy illustration of what the religious instinct is without a divine revelation such as Christianity brings. Buddhism is merely the moral reform of an idolatrous religion; and it is a reform which has failed.

These religions, when set beside Christianity, and tried by the test of their moral scale, are like the sandheaps children have piled on the beach as compared with the steadfast hills that girdle the far-off horizon.

But it may be asked, again, what about the darker side of Christianity—its schisms, its heresies, its persecutions, the ecclesiastical quarrels which break it into fragments?

The existence of these things is not to be denied. They show how stubborn are the forces in human life which make for evil, and how tragically slow the human mind is to comprehend the true genius of Christianity. But that it is so slow to understand and to assimilate it is another proof that it is utterly incapable of inventing it. And what more shining proof

of the divine origin of Christianity can be imagined than the fact that it has survived, through all these centuries, the heresies and disloyalties of its own followers?

The strength of the argument for the separate and divine character of Jesus Christ may be brought out in another way. The story of the death of Socrates is, in some senses, the high-water mark not only of Greek, but of universal, literature. The Phaedo has made it immortal. It is the death scene of Socrates, as told by Plato: and the tale has in it every element of pathos and beauty; it is set, too, in an atmosphere of profound feeling.

The sacred ship has just arrived from Delos. It is the death signal, and Socrates, before he drinks the hemlock, sits among his friends and holds high debate on the great theme of immortality. The sanest, if not the loftiest, intellect the human race has produced, just as he passes into the shadow and mystery of death, pauses to tell us why he believes death cannot slay him. And the smile on his face as he talks, the serene courage, the unfaltering accents, give strange

power to his logic. Never did a brave spirit pass out of life more bravely; and the art of the story, with its occasional play of humor, its points of homely incident, is nothing less than exquisite.

Now, let the immortal scene in the prison on the Agora at Athens be contrasted with the scene in the upper room at Jerusalem. If Socrates and Christ are both men, and are to be judged by human conditions, it cannot be doubted that the Greek ought to outsoar and outshine the Jew. Socrates represents the flower of Greek genius, in the very climax of Grecian history. He is a philosopher, familiar with great affairs and great men, wise with the wisdom of seventy years, and wise in the knowledge of all the schools. His life had been one long intellectual discipline, and in that last scene he has Plato for reporter. Christ, on the other hand, is a Galilean peasant, with only peasants for followers and friends.

And yet by what measureless degrees the Galilean exceeds the Greek! The merely intellectual note is incomparably higher. Let there

be recalled the account Socrates gives of what may be called the geography of Hades—Tartarus, with its tangle of dark rivers—some of fire, and some of mud—its vague seas, its troops of phantom spirits; the reincarnation of the wicked as hawks and vultures, and of the good as bees, wasps, ants, or—climax of bliss! —as philosophers. With this, compare the calm words, the high and serene certainty of Jesus Christ: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

The moral note, again, is not merely infinitely higher, it belongs to another order. In the scene in the Agora what is there which corresponds to that pathetic act when Christ girded himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet—the sublimest object-lesson imaginable as to the law and habit of love up to which he was lifting his followers? The Greek sends away his wife and children as irrelevant and disturbing influences, or tools for which he has no further use. The only moral advice Socrates can offer the little debating society in which he

sits is to neglect and despise the body; like philosophers, they are to believe that the invisible soul is the only reality, and to treat everything except it as shadows. The proofs of immortality Socrates details are the arguments of a philosopher, and are addressed to philosophers. They are ingenious and subtle—often oversubtle.

But in spite of his high courage the Greek can offer his listening friends nothing very certain. He justifies his sketch of Hades by saying: "It is well to find a charm for one's fears, and on this account it is that I thus prolong my tale." Who will be their teacher, he is asked, when he is gone? Greece, he tells them, "is a wide place, and there are in it many good men. There are, besides, many races of Barbarians, all of whom are to be explored"—in search of someone who can supply such a charm as they are discussing, a charm for death. Of himself he says, "Whether I tried in the right way, and with what success, I shall know certainly when I arrive there," but not till then.

Let all this be compared with the accents of

Christ, "I go to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." There speaks the Lord of life and death—of this and of all other worlds!

The contrast betwixt the two figures is measureless. Socrates argues, Christ announces. The one guesses, the other *knows*. Socrates reasons and refines like a philosopher; Christ talks in the accents of a Redeemer. The last words of Socrates are: "Crito, we owe a cock to Æsculapius; discharge it, and do not neglect it." Compare with this the last utterance of Christ: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit;" or, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." We repeat that, taking the purely human elements, the Greek ought to move at a higher level than the Jew; and yet as the two figures stand side by side, who will deny that Christ belongs to a different order—to an immeasurably loftier order—than

Socrates? Whence did Christ get his unique scale?

And let the impression that each has made on the human race be contrasted. No human soul turns back to Socrates for redemption. No pillow under a dying head is made softer by having the Phaedo beneath it. No mother standing beside her child's grave tries to heal her broken heart with the logic of the Agora. But the supper in the upper room at Jerusalem has become a sacrament for all time and for all generations. The words of Christ in that scene have changed the world's history. The contrast betwixt Socrates and Christ in these parallel scenes is incontrovertible and measureless. How is it to be explained?

One of two things is absolutely certain: either Christ was more than Socrates, and "more" in the sense that he belonged to a different order of being, or else those who invented that story of the upper room in Jerusalem were greater than Plato. And as there were four of them, this theory carries with it the belief that there were *four* Jewish Platos,

who, without any touch of Greek genius, imagined more nobly than the greatest genius Greece ever produced; and who, being themselves rogues—since they have forged the story—yet invented a tale so rich in moral elements that it has given the human race itself a new system of ethics.

We know, on the strength of an epigram written to refute it, that somebody, centuries afterwards, denied that Plato had written the Phaedo. "If Plato did not write it," ran the epigram, "then there were two Platos." But, as we have seen, the theory which rejects the divinity of Jesus Christ requires us to believe in *four* Platos; all of them Jewish peasants, all of them rogues; all of them agreed in one invention, exquisitely the same, yet exquisitely different; and all of them accomplished the miracle of making a lie a more effective instrument of morality than all the truths of all the philosophers history knows. The belief of unbelief at this point leaves the faith of universal Christianity dwarfed and microscopic.

For some the fundamental conception of

Christianity, the entrance of Christ as a new and divine force in human history, is made incredible by the fact that it seems in quarrel with what they hold to be the master truth of science, the theory of evolution. On the extreme reading of the evolution theory the cosmos is a sealed chamber. Nothing can appear at any stage in the process which was not present at the starting point. Evolution tolerates no new factors, still less one so revolutionary—so completely out of the natural order—as Christ interpreted by Christian faith seems to be.

But the formula of evolution must find room for new factors, or it is visibly inadequate as an explanation of the system of things. The great uniformities of nature know gaps which can only be filled by new creative acts.

Evolution, for example, has no explanation for the fact of life. Life, it is certain, cannot be explained by its physical antecedents; and it is the circumstance that evolution can offer no explanation of the appearance of life which still keeps that great theory in the hypothetical stage. "Spontaneous generation," says Huxley,

"is a necessary corollary from Darwin's views," but it is a corollary which is unjustified by any known evidence. The great teachers of evolution have an almost invincible bias in favor of the doctrine that the gap betwixt the living and the nonliving can be bridged; but no known bridge exists, and they are too honest to deny the facts. Almost every famous name in modern science can be quoted in proof of the doctrine that life cannot be explained by its physical antecedents. "If the evolution hypothesis is true," says Huxley,[1] "living matter must have arisen from not living matter." But in his address as President of the British Association he declared the case against the production of life from the nonliving to be "victorious all along the line." "The present state of knowledge," he wrote, "furnishes us with no link between the living and the not living." Darwin himself wrote: "No evidence worth anything has as yet been advanced in favor of a living being being developed from inorganic matter." Tyndall and Herbert Spencer are

[1]Encyclopædia Britannica, "Biology."

equally emphatic. "Life," says Spencer, "cannot be conceived in physicochemical terms." "I affirm," says Tyndall, "that no shred of trustworthy experimental evidence exists to prove that life in our day has ever appeared independently of antecedent life."[1] "Transubstantiation would be nothing to this," says Huxley, "if it happened."

Science, then, has no explanation to offer of the sudden emergence in the process of evolution of the phenomenon of life. Wallace, who shares with Darwin the honor of the discovery of evolution, declares "there are at least three stages in the development of the organic world where some new cause or power must necessarily have come into action."[2] The first is in the change from inorganic to organic. "The first vegetable cell was a new thing in the world, possessing altogether new powers." This was life, but still life without consciousness. The next stage "still more completely," says Wallace, "beyond all possibility of ex-

[1] Nineteenth Century, 1898, p. 507.
[2] Darwinism, p. 474.

planation, by matter, its laws and forces, is sensation or consciousness; the distinction betwixt the vegetable and the animal." The third gap in the process of evolution is the appearance of self-conscious mind.

If the formula of evolution, therefore, is so narrowly construed that the entrance of any new factor is forbidden, these three great facts are left unexplained. Christian faith can accept evolution as the mode in which God has administered his universe, but God cannot be conceived as touching his universe only at the starting point and then emigrating from it forever. These gaps in the process of evolution are, as Christian faith reads the problem, bridged by creative acts; and there is an order in the entrance of these new factors. They rise step above step; and each new factor in turn uses the realm beneath it as its servant. Life, consciousness, personality—this is the order of time in which they make their appearance; but this is also the order of thought. It represents a true ascent in values. The outlines of some great pyramid, rising to an apex, are visible.

And if at some point above human personality there breaks into the process a Personality which is divine, what is this but the philosophic and scientific, as well as the religious, apex of the great pyramid of the universe? Christ's entrance into the evolutionary process on this reading does not arrest or destroy the process. It is its consummation. It is not a discord striking across the music of the universe; it is the perfection of its harmony.

It must be remembered that, by the admission of Huxley himself, the great protagonist of the evolution theory, that theory does not extend to morals. We can only reach what is ethically best by *inverting* its principles. "The practice of that which is ethically best—what we call goodness or virtue—involves," says Huxley, "a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence. In place of ruthless self-assertion it demands self-restraint; its influence is directed not so much to the survival of the fittest as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive. It repudiates

the gladiatorial theory of existence." He sums up the position by saying: "Let us understand, once for all, that the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it."

Now, if the practice of morality in its highest terms puts aside the principles on which the evolution theory is built, does anyone wonder that the highest expression, in living and personal terms, of the highest ethics should be, not the product of evolution, but the entrance into it of a new force, from still higher levels of life? On scientific principles, in a word—on the principles of the evolution theory itself—human history in the moral realm needs an incarnation.

On such a basis of proof as is here, in the briefest fashion suggested, the Christian faith stands. And in a world where men, every hour of the day, and in every concern of daily life, have to act on imperfect knowledge—on evidence which stops short of mathematical certainty—what faintest justification can there be

for putting Christianity aside as a thing it is safe to ignore?

The Christian does not risk life and death on a guess. He does not wander in a realm of dim uncertainties. The sunshine lies about him. The ground under his feet is firm, the skies above are radiant. Bushnell puts very happily the conclusion of the whole argument:

"The world itself is changed; it has never been the same since Jesus left it. The air is charged with heavenly odors, and a kind of celestial consciousness, a sense of other worlds, is wafted on us in its breath. Let the dark ages come, let society roll backward, and churches perish in whole regions of the earth; let infidelity deny, and, what is worse, let spurious piety dishonor, the truth. Still, there is something here that was not, and something that has immortality in it. Still our confidence remains unshaken, that Christ and his all-quickening life are in the world, as fixed elements, and will be to the end of time. For Christianity is not so much the advent of a better doctrine as of a perfect character; and how can a perfect

character, once entered into life and history, be separated and finally expelled? Look ye hither, all ye blinded and fallen mankind; a better nature is among you; a pure heart, out of some pure world, is come into your prison, and walks it with you. Do you require of us to tell you who he is, and definitely expound his person? We may not be able. Enough to know that he is not of us—some strange being out of nature and above it, whose name is Wonderful. Enough that sin has never touched his hallowed nature, and that he is a friend. In him dawns a hope—purity has not come into our world, except to purify. 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!' Light breaks in, peace settles on the air, and lo! the prison walls are giving way—rise, let us go."

PART II

THE ALTERNATIVES TO FAITH IN CHRIST

CHAPTER I

The Theory that Christ Never Existed

It is no use to say that Christ, as exhibited in the Gospels, is not historical. Who amongst his disciples, or amongst their proselytes, was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee; as certainly not Saint Paul, whose idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort.—John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion,* p. 253.

Suppose that Plato and Newton never lived—that their story is a lie—but who did their works and thought their thoughts? It takes a Newton to forge a Newton. What man could have fabricated a Jesus? None but a Jesus.—Theodore Parker, *Discourses on Religion,* p. 276.

We have now reached the point at which we can ask what, if this faith about Christ be rejected, are the substitutes which must take its place? To criticise is not enough; we have to explain. Christ certainly cannot be dismissed as an idle problem that calls for no explanation: a figure so remote, or so insignificant, that we may treat it as nonexistent. His very name

is a solvent. It is a test both for men and nations. *"What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"* asked the perplexed Roman governor two thousand years ago, and every man, in turn, stands where Pilate stood, and must ask and answer his question.

And if Christ be dismissed as a dream, or an impostor, it is certain that Someone, or Something, must take his place. The soul, like nature, abhors a vacuum. Doubt about Christ is itself a creed about him. Who dismisses Christ from his life affirms by that act that he has a creed about him more satisfying, better authenticated by evidence, and burdened with fewer difficulties than the accepted belief of Christianity. Where is such an alternative creed to be discovered?

The direct alternatives to Christian faith, as a matter of fact, are few in number, and perfectly definite in character. The difficulties they raise, the weight of evidence on their side, can be easily assessed. Plain sense can judge their value when cast in the scale against the general belief about Christ.

There is, first of all, the theory that *Jesus Christ never existed.* He is the dream of a forgotten poet, or even the invention of a perished rogue—a rogue who has somehow succeeded in tricking the world for twenty centuries, but whose name, curiously enough, nobody has ever succeeded in discovering. The name of Christ is, on this theory, nothing better than the label of a fraud, or of an aggregation of frauds, which have gathered round mere vacancy. Christ's feet never trod the soil of Palestine. His face is an illusion; his miracles are fables; his whole story is a fiction; behind his teaching there is no real voice.

The world, we are asked to believe, dates its chronology from an event which never happened, and Christianity is that scientific impossibility, an effect without a cause; a chain that has no first link; a geometrical progression of which the starting point is a cipher.

This is an explanation of Jesus Christ it is impossible to take seriously. No scholar would make himself responsible for it; no historian will lend it the shelter of his name.

The higher critics of the more reckless school have whittled down Christ's sayings to the vanishing point. Only twelve poor words, we are asked to believe, survive their performances. But even these twelve words imply that Christ existed. The lonely, mutilated syllables must have behind them a life and the teachings of a life. These teachings as a whole, we are assured, have somehow slipped from human memory; but they must have been in keeping with the divine words which even a Schmeidel admits undoubtedly came from Christ's lips. The notion, in a word, that there never was a Christ is an incredibility which requires a hundred times more faith for its acceptance than belief in all the creeds of all the churches.

Christ, on the theory that he never existed, is only a portrait, and a portrait with no face behind it. And yet, somehow, this imaginary face has changed the world's history. How did a cluster of Jewish peasants and fishermen paint a face beyond the reach of any skill known to the genius of Michael Angelo or Raphael? Nay, they painted *four* such por-

traits, and they all agree, in spite of a score of differences: they are all charged with the same mysterious power. It is surely more credible, to quote Rousseau, that such a Person actually existed, than that four men should independently invent him.

The Jew of the time of Augustus Cæsar, it may be added, was perhaps the one figure in the human race least disposed to attempt such an invention. His virtues as well as his limitations disqualified him. The stubborn monotheism of his faith predisposed him to reject an incarnation; the cast-iron quality of his morality made the spiritual teaching of Jesus Christ to him not only incredible but unthinkable. He was jealous in temper; caste pride burned in him like a flame; for all other nations he had the scorn a Brahman feels for the pariah. Was *he* likely to welcome, still more to *invent*, a religion that claimed to be universal, and whose generous appeal overleaped all race distinctions?

And if the Jews were incapable of drawing the portrait of Christ, certainly the first gen-

erations of Christians were equally incapable of the task. All that the Christians of after time could do with the original delineation of Christ, says Henry Rogers, was—"to spoil it."

The proof of the existence of any great character in history—say of Homer, or of Alexander, or Cæsar—does not consist in a legal certificate of birth, or the formal verdict of a jury of their contemporaries. It is found in the signature on literature, or history, these men have made.

What is the evidence that Shakespeare lived? He is not, like Christ, twenty centuries distant; less than four hundred years part him from us. And yet how little of first-hand and detailed evidence we have as to Shakespeare's existence, or as to the facts of his life! The dates of the principal events in his history—of his birth, of his marriage, and of his plays—are all matters of dispute. His biography is, for the most part, a catalogue of guesses. There are sixteen different ways of spelling his very name. Only five autographs, with more or less of highly doubtful evidence as to their genuineness, sur-

vive. A controversy, which has created a vast literature of its own, as to whether he really wrote the plays that bear his name, still rages.

But who asks for a certificate of Shakespeare's birth, and a complete biography, with verified dates, before believing there *was* a Shakespeare? His plays are his credentials. Nobody will believe that a myth wrote Hamlet. Shakespeare or Bacon are only labels for the subtle, magnificent genius that gave us Macbeth and the Midsummer Night's Dream. The labels may be shifted; but it is not possible to deny that *someone* lived, with the imagination of a Shakespeare, who created these masterpieces of literature. The English language itself is the proof that Shakespeare lived. No myth will explain the museum at Stratford.

And these arguments, multiplied a hundredfold, constitute the evidence that Jesus Christ was a real Person. It is not merely that the almanac, in which all civilized time is dated from his birth, proves that Christ existed. History, taken as a whole, is unintelligible without him; the living world is unintelligible. "It is

Christ who rules British India," says Keshab Chunder Sen, the greatest spiritual genius modern India has produced, when trying to explain the puzzle of two hundred and ninety-four million of the human race governed by forty million on the other side of the planet. And Christ is the key to all the puzzles of the living world. When anyone undertakes to prove that Christ did not exist two thousand years ago he may well be asked to attempt a feat much nearer at hand. Let him prove that he does not exist today!

Shakespeare touched, and still touches, only one realm of human life. Christ touches all races and generations. Time, for him, has no arresting force; space has no separating power. We know that he exists as we know that there is a force like gravitation, or an energy like electricity. The pull of every atom of matter proves the one; the tinkle of every telephone bell is witness to the other.

This, in the last analysis, is the supreme evidence of the existence of Christ. His hand is visibly on the world's life today. There are

myriads of living men and women who know that he touches their sin to rebuke it, their grief to comfort it, their conscience to quicken it. He is working these miracles *now,* exactly as he did in the days of his flesh two thousand years ago; the only difference is that today his miracles are wrought in spiritual terms.

And, it may be repeated, the appeal is not to the subjective experiences of individual men and women merely. It is to the changed curve in the history of the race.

The discovery of the planet Neptune is one of the romances of astronomy. A scientific observer studying the orbit of Uranus found that at one point the planet swung from its true path. What force was it which, across measureless leagues of space, touched the planet with some strange disturbing influence, and drew it into a new course? It was scientifically certain that some unknown body was calling to its sister planet, and attracting it with an energy sufficient to change its orbit. And following the clew of that calling force—measuring the strength and following the line of its pull—

Neptune, the loneliest and remotest planet in the group, spending a hundred and sixty-five solar years in its mighty curve round the sun, was discovered.

And who looks at the history of the human race sees that at a certain moment the curve of its orbit is suddenly changed. Up to a certain point the course of history is a straight line, and a line, alas! that runs downward. But at a given moment—a moment perfectly ascertainable—the line of history is deflected; it turns upward; it runs upward still! And at the point of the curve stands one Figure. It is the figure of the Galilean!

Whatever theory men may hold as to his nature, or his character, or his teaching, it is a fact beyond sane doubt that Christ has changed the entire course of human history. He has set the race moving on a new curve, and under the action of new forces. And as a mute and impressive witness of that fact civilized mankind reckons its time from his birth. To deny that he existed is to say that the planet Uranus moved on a new ellipse without the action of

any force to explain the change. No explanation of the changed direction of the history and the civilization of the world is possible save that which is found in the emergence of a new and divine Personality.

Suppose that some lunatic astronomer denied the existence of the sun. Its light, he might contend, is quite insufficient as a proof of the sun's existence. What is light but a vibration in the ether acting on the optic nerve, and producing a certain change in the gray matter of the brain. If the optic nerve behind the pupil of the eye be snapped or diseased, is it not certain that, for the owner of that nerve, the glory of the sun perishes?

But the whole solar system, it might be replied, is a proof that the sun exists. Its order, its balance, the silent, unceasing rhythm of the planets constitute the evidence that the sun is a reality. The "pull" of the sun is needed to explain the mathematics of the solar system. And in exactly the same way the history, the civilization, the life of the world about us are unintelligible apart from the fact of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER II

The Theory that Christ Was an Impostor

Christ pours out a doctrine beautiful as the light, sublime as heaven, and true as God.—Theodore Parker, *Discourses on Religion*, p. 303.

It must be taken as certain that Christ existed; but it may be argued that, at least, his claim to be divine is false; and if false, it must represent the fraud of an impostor, a trick played on the imagination of an unscientific age. If Christ was a man exactly like the rest of his race, and with the qualities and limitations of other men, he must have known this, assuming him to be sane; and when he claimed to be more than man he was—to put it in plain words—a conscious deceiver. He is not the creation, but the creator, of a fraud.

His miracles, on this theory, were nothing better than tricks, and he knew it. His pretensions to supernatural authority were either lies, or flights of lunacy. His sayings about

himself, indeed, on the supposition that he was only a man, are in exactly the accents of lunacy. "I," he says, "am the light of the world." When he spoke those words, did he know himself to be an unlettered man, the son of a peasant, his only school of philosophy the village carpenter's shop? "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Behind that strange call was there nothing but a human consciousness? "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." What man has the right to speak such words to his fellow-men?

If the speaker was only an untaught, undistinguished Jew, no different from any other Jew of his time, a Galilean peasant in the days when Palestine was a province of the Cæsars, then he was not merely an impostor, he was the most ridiculous impostor the race has produced. And what is curious, he was an impostor without the motives of one. For Christ never deceived himself. He knew that at the end of his brief ministry the cross waited for him.

An impostor! Then the one effective moral teacher human history knows was a rogue who spent his life—nay, who laid down his life—to enforce on others maxims he did not himself obey. The theory is the most insane of paradoxes!

It is usual to wrap up this theory in soft words, to hang round it a nimbus of polite generalities. No one will put it in plain speech. Those who contend in the loudest tones that Christ was a man, on the same level of nature with all other men, are yet eager to adorn him with compliments. They vie with his most devoted followers in ascribing every virtue to him. He was the highest and noblest of men.

But if Christ had no other than a human consciousness—if he knew himself to be only a man at the moment he claimed to be infinitely more than man, there is no room for compliments. A *man* talking in Christ's accents, making Christ's claims, uttering Christ's promises, assuming Christ's attitude to the rest of his race, is, it must be repeated, the most stupendous impostor on record.

Where else can be found an example of claims so wild, made in tones so calm and assured? "Before Abraham was, I am." "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." If these words have not behind them a divine consciousness, and a divine authority, they are, it must be said afresh, either the wildest lunacies, or they are the most extravagant, and, it may be added, the most meaningless imposture to be discovered in history. From that conclusion there is literally no escape.

But to state some charges is to refute them. Who would not treat it as a jest if asked to believe that behind Paradise Lost there was the brain of an idiot; that the imagination of a rogue gave birth to the Imitatio Christi; or that the appetites of swine created In Memoriam? And to put the soul of a conscious impostor behind the face of Christ, to trace the Sermon on the Mount to the vanity of a diseased intellect, to find the root of what is, on any theory as to its origin, the profoundest spiritual teaching the race knows, in the arts of a

rogue, the falsehood of a deceiver—this is a vaster folly still.

Whatever is true, *this* cannot be! It is an incredibility so vast that to believe it requires a more stupendous effort of faith than the acceptance of all the fables of the Talmud, or of King Arthur's Round Table.

We have thus got a step further. Christ certainly existed. To doubt this is to quarrel with history. It were as reasonable to doubt whether Alexander existed, or Cæsar, or Napoleon Bonaparte. And accepting the fact that Jesus Christ existed, he cannot be set in the pillory of human scorn as an impostor. He must have believed in himself, and in what he claimed for himself. If any words that ever fell from human lips ring with the accents of sincerity, they are his. So those who reject his divinity are driven to the theory that he was a pure-minded but self-deluded dreamer, who took himself seriously. He did not try to deceive the world. He deceived himself.

This, however, is to save Christ's honesty at the expense of his sanity. He believed in his

own miracles, though they never existed. He was able to describe himself as the "light of the world," and he actually mistook himself for that light, when he was really an unlettered Jewish peasant, the head of a tiny Jewish sect. This is to say, as a matter of fact, that Jesus Christ is to be dismissed from consideration as a lunatic. Only under the roof of a lunatic asylum is such language as his found on merely human lips. Those who deny the divinity of Jesus Christ ought to have the courage of their logic. They ought to be prepared to sign a certificate of lunacy for Jesus Christ!

Yet who, not being himself a lunatic, would put his name to such a certificate? In the whole compass of human literature, where is speech to be found shining with the pure white radiance of perfect reason in an equal degree with the teachings of Jesus Christ? In all recorded human thinking, whose thoughts move with a flight so steady, and in a realm so high, as his? The homely speech of Socrates himself has not more of the salt of reason; the philosophy of Plato is not so serenely luminous. The wisest

in every generation since he was born sit at his feet to learn; the saintliest stand rebuked before his purity.

If a plebiscite of the human race were taken, would a single vote be cast in favor of the theory that Jesus Christ was either an impostor —or a madman? If such a vote *were* cast, the owner of it would find no hole into which he could creep and hide himself from the contempt of mankind.

CHAPTER III

The Theory that Christ is Only a Myth

You have to account for a man born in the imagination of some other man, and who, as a creature of imagination, has risen to the supreme place in human history, and who today rules innumerable millions of human lives and ministries and destinies. It is easy to call him and his work mythical, romantic, fabulous, but that does not account for the profound moral influence, the beneficent results, and the whole ministry that is represented by the term "Christ."—Dr. Parker, *The People's Bible;* Matthew, p. 386.

So far, the doubts about Christ—which are only positive creeds disguised—the direct alternatives to belief in his divinity can be shown, one by one, to be incredible. He actually existed. He was not a shameless and conscious impostor. He was not a lunatic. The Sermon on the Mount did not find its cradle in a diseased brain, and the parables of Christ are not the reflex of a disordered mind.

There remains, as an alternative to Christian faith, and as a positive creed about Christ, only one theory which is so much as thinkable. He

was a beautiful character, half mystic, half poet, and whole dreamer; "a beautiful but ineffectual angel," to quote Max Gohre, "beating in the void his luminous wings in vain." He lived a life so blameless, and yet so pathetic, that it has seized the imagination of the race; and round it, as the centuries pass, there has naturally and inevitably gathered a world of touching myths. The Gospels are to be read with pitying and respectful tenderness as the records of a beautiful delusion; a dream which has solidified into a myth, or a group of myths.

Christ was not responsible for these myths. He did not invent them. They simply gathered —a sort of shining poetic dew—about his memory. He is thus to be regarded as the unconscious human kernel to a cloud of rose-colored fables—fables born of superstition, or imagination, and which have hardened with the process of time into something that resembles history.

Just as amber gathers round some accidental substance—a straw, or a fly—and embalms it, wraps it in perfume, makes it imperishable, so

the dreams and the superstitions of the race have gathered round Jesus Christ. He is a butterfly who, in this way, has been transformed into a jewel.

This is an explanation of Christ which allows the skeptic to be polite to him, or even to admire him, while yet dismissing his claims as so much idle vapor.

But to this theory some very obvious and fatal criticisms apply. We are asked to regard the Sermon on the Mount, the story of the miracles, the matchless tragedy of the betrayal and the agony and the cross, as forms of crystallized superstition. Now, human superstition is an ignoble thing, intellectually lower than philosophy or poetry. And yet, on this theory, it has done what philosophy or poetry could never accomplish. It has given birth to conceptions which have not merely colored the life of the world; they have ennobled that life. They have transfigured to a new pattern the civilizations in which the life of the race expresses itself. They are doing it still, though the superstitions from which they come have

been exposed and renounced. This, surely, is the last of incredibilities.

It is more plausible, perhaps, to describe the story of Christ as the crystallized imagination, rather than the concrete superstition of the race. Out of that imagination has been evolved the dream—the poet's vision—of a perfect life; a life untouched by the evil of the world, the ideal of what every man might wish himself to be. And picturesque traditions, and more or less plausible dogmas, have grown naturally from this dream, or have been attracted to it. So we get the radiant, but imaginary figure of Jesus Christ, a myth born of the dreaming human imagination. And this theory, it may be claimed, at least does not insult Christ.

But "imagination" is not a vague, diffused element—say, like gravitation—a homeless force which operates everywhere, but finds its center nowhere. It is a personal quality, the endowment of some single intellect. Now, if Christ—the Christ of the church's faith—did not exist, but is the creation of the human mind, the question arises, of *whose* imagination is he

the child? What nameless Shakespeare—or procession of Shakespeares—invented him, and equipped him with a story so wonderful, teaching so profound, a philosophy so lofty? A geometrical progression with a cipher for its starting point is a sufficiently startling conception; and if Christianity is such a progression, the puzzle arises: "Who was the unknown inventor of that amazing cipher which, being nothing, has yet yielded a sum total so stupendous?"

For this is a "myth" which to this very day has in it an energy as of dynamite. It turned the group of Christ's immediate disciples—who were visibly commonplace men—into forces which have affected the history of the race more profoundly than any of the memorable figures in war, or statesmanship, or science, or philosophy that can be named. "The men who have turned the world upside down," is the description of their alarmed contemporaries; and the men who thus changed the very order of society are Peter, who denied his Lord; Paul, who persecuted his followers; John and James,

with their companions, who fled from him at the moment of his arrest. But they recovered their faith in Christ, and the recovery transformed them into human forces without parallel in human history!

We know what is possible in the way of creation to the human imagination. Shakespeare is its high-water mark, so far as the English-speaking race is concerned. But who could suppose one of the imaginary characters created by his genius—say, Hamlet or Titania—stepping off the stage—turning all history, indeed, into a stage for itself—creating a new literature of its own, vaster than its own author was able to create for himself; reshaping civilization, giving a new standard to duty, evolving martyrs, inspiring saints, putting hymns on countless lips, building ten thousand places of worship! And we are asked to believe that the "imagination" of some dreamer, a compound of rogue and lunatic, using the figure of a Jewish peasant as its raw material, has performed this miracle! This would be a greater wonder than any recorded in the four Gospels.

It may be added that this particular "myth" is burdened with a special incredibility. For the mythologies of Greece and Rome, or of Eastern lands, the notion of an incarnation, or of many incarnations, was easy. But to the Jews, and to the faith of the Jewish people, the idea was abhorrent. They sent Christ, as a matter of fact, to his death for claiming to be the Son of God. The Jewish mind, whatever other element of religious faith it had lost, still kept possession of the doctrine of the unity of God; and that doctrine, as Jewish thought interpreted it, was in utter hostility to the very notion of an incarnation. And to explain the Christian doctrine of the incarnation as a myth generated in the brains of half a dozen Jewish fishermen—this is an incredibility greater than the incarnation itself.

It is clear, again, that no single intellect is concerned with the invention of the fable—if it be a fable—on which Christianity is built. A whole procession of dreamers and rogues, scattered over a period of many years and an area of many lands, must have been engaged

in the process. Now, the notion of the composite authorship of the Iliad was killed by the argument that it was easier to believe in one Homer than in a dozen; and the suggestion, it may be added, that no Homer ever existed, may fitly enough be killed by the consideration that somebody who, not being Homer, invented him, and wrote the Iliad for him, would be a vastly more astonishing person than Homer himself.

But if we reject the notion of an historic Christ, a real Person, who spoke the words and performed the deeds described in the four Gospels, then we have to believe in the existence of an unknown number of forgotten geniuses, of nameless poets and unrecorded Shakespeares, who conspired to produce the character of Jesus. They invented his history, forged his parables; and, though acting without concert with each other, have produced an absolutely harmonious conception.

For no harmony known to music is more perfect than the harmony of qualities which make up the character of Christ, as painted in the

Gospels. And wrought into the beautifully simple story and character of Christ are meanings and truths the race masters only slowly, and has not, even yet, mastered fully. The character thus invented resembles, as a matter of fact, a record in cipher. Generation after generation spells out some new syllable of the cipher, and so the revelation grows; but always it is self-consistent, and always it is in advance of the highest thought straining to interpret it.

Here is something without parallel in literature: a character so noble in conception, so pure in teaching, so profound and sustained in its influence that it has changed the story of the world. Today it kindles the worship, and colors the lives of countless multitudes.

And that the conception of such a character is the work of a committee of unknown rogues —of rogues without any intelligible motive, who belonged to different ages and worked without concert or common plan—this, surely, is a theory no sane mind can accept. It overtaxes human credulity.

When we are told, moreover, that Christ is

simply an accidental human center to an equally accidental collection of myths it is worth while to remember that even a myth needs an explanation. It has its own laws and limitations.

What may be called the natural history of myths is quite intelligible. Like certain fungoid growths, they need a special atmosphere for their development. They grow rankly in the darkness. Light kills them as it kills some microbes.

Now, it is certain that no such atmosphere lies about the birth of Christianity. It did not arise in a dim and remote antiquity when fables came easily into birth. Christ was born more than four centuries after Plato. His cradle stands in the very center of what is known as the "Golden Age" of Roman literature. Pliny was twenty-three years old when the angels sang the first Christmas "Adeste"; Juvenal was born seven years after the crucifixion; Seneca's epistles are contemporary with those of Saint Paul.

A generation which saw Augustus on the throne, which had Tacitus for historian, and

Juvenal for poet and satirist, was certainly not credulous or superstitious. It was a wearied and skeptical age. It had tried every experiment, exhausted every pleasure, stripped itself of every belief. Such an age is as unfavorable to the evolution of myths as an acid solution is to the growth of weeds.

Myths, again, need much time for their evolution. A human figure must grow dim and vague from mere distance; close personal knowledge—the knowledge that disillusionizes—must perish before a nimbus of myths can gather about it. As no man can be a hero to his valet, so no man with the limitations of his kind can be glorified and vaporized into a myth while his contemporaries live. But Christ came to his full estate in the belief of his followers almost at a single step. Paul's letters are the final proof of this. They were written within less than thirty years of the crucifixion, and are the earliest and most authentic of Christian documents. They are admitted by the highest critical authorities to be genuine. And in these letters Christ emerges full-statured and divine,

with the faith concerning him as clear-cut as a cameo, as definite as a steel die. Less than thirty years after the Roman whips had scourged him and the Roman soldiers cast lots for his garments, Christ stands revealed in these letters, the world's Redeemer—exactly as he stands today, after twenty centuries have gone.

Paul, it must be remembered, was not a narrow-brained fanatic, an enthusiast careless of logic. He was a scholar, a thinker, one of the great intellects of the race. He has made a deeper impress on history than Cæsar or Shakespeare. His philosophy touches a higher note than that of Socrates; his moral teaching is of a more practical fiber than that of Marcus Aurelius. He is the most impressive witness as to the person of Christ that can be put in the box, and nothing can be more absolute and decisive than his testimony.

He not only believes, on the authority of an amazing personal experience, in the resurrection of Christ; he remembers and numbers the witnesses who saw the risen Saviour. No belief

can be more confident, and no teaching about Christ more definite or positive in character, than his. We are justified, he declares, by his grace. The race is put into a new relationship with God by his incarnation. All men are to stand at his judgment seat. Not to love him is to be anathema maranatha.

We are not called at this point to discuss whether these teachings are true or not; they at least prove that the figure of Jesus Christ cannot be classed as a myth. It stands, as seen by his contemporaries, and in the light of that first generation, exactly as it does today after twenty centuries have passed.

Myths, again, if they are easily evolved, are easily slain. Time is cruel to them. Science is fatal. Mere increase of knowledge kills them, as light destroys certain low forms of life. But the "myth" of Jesus Christ has survived the passage of two thousand years, and stands undissolved in the white light of the twentieth century.

This statement, indeed, is inadequate. The story of Christ satisfies the demands of science

by gathering to itself an ever more triumphant verification, born of that final test of any creed, the test of actual human experience. For the gospel of Jesus Christ, it must be remembered, is not a philosophy; it is not a collection of legends and poems. It has a philosophy, indeed, nobler than the schools of Athens or of Rome ever heard, and poems sweeter than any Homer or Virgil ever sang. But it does not pretend to be a mere form, no matter how stately and noble, of literature. It is a statute book, and has the functions of a statute book. "The question," says Bacon, "is to be settled not by argument but by trying." And men—generation after generation—have actually "tried" Christ's laws, and find that they work.

It might be possible to wrangle indefinitely over the symbols which make up a chemical formula; but science accepts the test of the laboratory as final. If every chemist who puts together the elements in the formula produces the same solution, what room is left for doubt? And the test of the validity of Christ's teaching lies near at hand and within every man's reach.

It is a rule of life. It has for everyday affairs the office of chart and compass and nautical almanac to the seaman.

Imagine a sea captain being told that his compass was a cheat, his chart an idle picture, his nautical almanac a collection of myths! He would not attempt to defend the methods of his art by syllogisms. "I have sailed by compass and chart for forty years," he would say, "and they have brought me to port." What logic can be simpler, or what proof more absolute?

CHAPTER IV

Contrasted Creeds

I esteem the Gospels to be thoroughly genuine, for there shines forth from them the reflected splendor of a sublimity proceeding from the person of Jesus Christ of so divine a kind as only the divine could ever have manifested on earth.—Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann,* iii, p. 371.

Either God has thus finally spoken, or there is no God, and man is the incomprehensible creation of chance and the sport of the chance that created him.—Pope's *Theology,* vol. i, p. 61.

In this list, thus briefly discussed, all the visible alternatives to the accepted faith about Christ are compressed. They confront each other. They challenge the verdict of every man's reason. They put the general human conscience on its trial. Some choice betwixt them is instant, urgent, inevitable. And which of them can for a moment compare, not merely for credibility, but for sanity, with the general faith of the Christian Church?

To say that *Christ never existed* is a sufficiently positive creed. But to undertake to

explain Christianity *without* Christ is a performance which can only kindle intellectual contempt. "It is of no use," to quote Mill once more, "to say that Christ as exhibited in the Gospels is not historical." It is "of no use" because the history of twenty centuries makes such a denial idle. To say, again, that he existed, but was a self-conscious impostor, is an offense to reason almost greater. It is to say that the one effective religion the world knows had its cradle in the brain of a rogue.

To say that *Christ was a blameless dreamer* —a dreamer with the general limitations of the race, and the special limitations of the age in which he lived, round whom the human imagination has hung an accidental garment of myths—is again a definite and intelligible creed. But it argues a greater miracle than is to be found within the covers of the Bible. This belief clothes that vague thing, imagination—the imagination of nobody in particular, the general unowned imagination of mankind—with a power of noble and sustained creation beyond all the writers and thinkers and poets

the race has ever produced. It is like saying that Cologne Cathedral had no particular architect, and was built on no specific plan. The vague "imagination" of the nameless hut-dwelling crowd, among whom it rose, produced it.

Any one of these theories about Jesus Christ is an offense to plain reason. But it may be asked, "How do these alternative creeds—these rivals to the Christian faith—affect morality? Do they carry with them any ethical results? And, if so, what is their nature?"

The answer is that if they stained through to the imagination, and captured the belief of the race, they would profoundly shake the very foundations on which morality stands.

If the race suddenly became convinced that Christ never existed, all that Christianity means would perish. The one effective system of ethics the race knows would be canceled. Morality itself would be discredited. Here is a moral code, it would be argued, which has emerged from nothing, which has meant nothing, but which has somehow for ages cheated

the intellect and enslaved the conscience of mankind. All codes as a result would grow suspect.

What effect on the world's morality would be produced, again, by the discovery that Christ was an impostor? The one figure which the race had agreed to accept as its highest ideal of goodness suddenly proved to be a cheat, a dissembler, a rogue *plus* a pious mask —who shall measure the moral disaster of such a discovery? It would mean the instant and universal wreck of conscience! Goodness itself might well be hated, since what had been adored for twenty centuries as its most perfect embodiment turned out to be only a veil covering the face of a lie. In the same way the discovery that Christ was nothing better than a myth would go far to resolve morality itself into a myth.

These are not arguments for continuing to believe in Christianity in spite of all disproof, but they may justly enough serve to make us hate the theories which, without any such disproof, would wreck the moral ideals of the race,

and turn the highest conception of Goodness which has ever broken upon human vision into an imposture. This, surely, is not only a sin against the Holy Ghost but a sin against the human race.

No! the saints and martyrs of all the Christian centuries have not been deceived. The deepest experiences of so many generations of godly men and women are not a delusion. Christ's great words about himself are true. He *is* the Light of the world. He is the eternal Word made flesh. He is a Force that draws all men unto himself. Above the wrecks of all opposing theories, and calm with all the peace of the stars, the Christian faith about Christ rises, like some soaring mountain peak—stately, strong, unshakable. It is buttressed with cliffs of granite, and white with unstained snows. The theories that would overthrow it are like the low huts, the insect-haunted scrub at its base.

BOOK III

THE BIBLE

PART I

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH ABOUT THE BIBLE

CHAPTER I

The Puzzle of the Bible

The Bible is a book which man could not have written if he would, and would not have written if he could.—Henry Rogers.

If an inhabitant of another planet were to visit our sphere, and should ask to see the most significant, victorious, and precious object now known to man, I, for one, should unhesitatingly show him the Bible.—Joseph Cook.

The Bible, as seen by Christian faith, is not a book of speculations and guesses, a book which represents the groping of the human mind after God. It is a revelation—a discovery God has made of himself to man. It is the statute book of the human race. There is a revelation of God in nature and in secular history. But language is the fundamental distinction betwixt man and the beasts. It is the Rubicon, to quote Max Müller, on the hither side of which men alone are found. "Man is man," says Humboldt, "only through speech." And it was

fitting that God, who has bestowed on us this great faculty of language, should make the highest disclosure of himself through that channel.

But if we consider the literary form through which these high offices are fulfilled, the Bible can only be described as a paradox, the disappointment of all human expectation. To look at, it is a book of scraps; a planless cluster of pamphlets, representing the literature of the most unliterary of nations. Here are sixty-six booklets of the most diverse character, some of them of unknown, some of doubtful, authorship, scattered thinly over sixteen centuries. They are made up of biographies, hymns, episodes of tribal history, laws of a social system which no longer exists, genealogies of men in whom nobody is interested, letters to churches dead for centuries, tales of old, far-off, forgotten things, and battles long ago. One book is an Eastern love story; another is an episode in Persian history which has not the name of God in it; yet another is the letter carried by an escaped slave who was being sent back to his

master; yet another is a collection of proverbs of the "Poor Richard" order.

Sixty-six pamphlets, written without concert by a scattered line of unknown men, and preserved, we hardly know how, packed with mysteries, full of what seem insignificant or irrelevant details. And yet this Book is the greatest literary possession of the race, the enduring revelation of God to man. It constitutes the title deeds of Christian institutions. It is the lesson book of Christian faith, the final code of human conduct. "We have no other Christian religion," says Dr. Pope, "than that which is one with its documents and records. The character of Christianity is the character of the Bible."

If asked to describe in advance what the Bible of the human race should be, certainly no one would have guessed this particular form. "Might we not easily have had," it is natural to ask, "a book with fewer mysteries and digressions, a book that left nothing untold, that could be demonstrated like a proposition in Euclid, and which no higher critics could dis-

solve into a mist of wavering dates?" A revelation given to all, given simultaneously, and given adequately: this is what seems to be needed.

Let us imagine a committee of philosophers —or of poets, or lawyers, or historians, or newspaper editors—employed to draw up in advance a plan for a Bible. It is highly probable, of course, that such a committee would never have agreed among themselves; but it is certain that if they had, they would have given us a Bible quite unlike that it has pleased God to bestow.

The lawyers would have given us a code, the theologians a catechism, the philosophers a volume of metaphysics. A committee of newspaper editors would have provided for us an "up-to-date" book, all "cross-heads" and sensations and picturesque descriptions. The poets would have given us an epic embroidered with sonnets. The scientists would have made science itself unnecessary by preparing us a compendium of all knowledge, the natural history of things in general, a book which

would have left the planet without a secret, and the human intellect with nothing to interest it.

All of them would have insisted on a library instead of a simple book. For consider the scale on which uninspired human literature is planned. Hodder's Life of the Earl of Shaftesbury—to take the first book on the shelf—contains some three hundred and sixty thousand words. Mr. Morley writes the Life of Gladstone on a still ampler scale, in two stupendous volumes. But for the life of Christ we have four thin pamphlets no bigger than tracts. Matthew tells the amazing story in twenty-three thousand words; Mark, in fifteen thousand words. When we remember how many volumes Kinglake takes to describe a third-rate war which settled nothing, and what space Macaulay requires to tell the tale of only six years of British history, what a stupendous book—or library of books— a committee of uninspired editors would require to tell the whole story of the planet, and of the religious history of the human race! The Bible that the human

mind would have invented is something to meditate over.

And yet this amazing book, that affronts all expectation, that seems, in literary form, to be utterly unfitted for the great offices of a Bible, has influenced the imagination of the world, and the history of the race, not only more than any other book that can be named but more than all other books put together. It has determined—or is visibly determining—the morality of the race. Nations live by it, or die by quarreling with it. This tiny collection of Hebrew books not only lies on every pulpit lid in Christendom, it is the shaping force in human affairs everywhere.

Theodore Parker was by no means an orthodox Christian, but he had a touch of true spiritual genius, and of the insight which spiritual genius gives; and his testimony to the Bible is a classic. The sun, he says, never sets on its gleaming page. It goes to the castle of the king and the cottage of the peasant. It colors the talk of the street, it is woven into the web of universal literature. It talks to us in our soli-

tude, consoles our grief, rebukes our baseness, gives new ideals to our conscience. The aching head finds a softer pillow when the Bible lies underneath it. This book blesses us when we are born, gives names to half Christendom, adds a sanctity to the marriage tie, writes an inscription of hope on the graves of the dead. "Our best of uttered prayers," says Theodore Parker, "are in its storied speech wherewith our fathers and the patriarchs prayed. Men who believe nothing else that is spiritual believe the Bible all through."

Generation after generation arises, each with its separate ideals and needs, each with its own language. The literature of yesterday is not the literature of today. Famous books go out of fashion, and are read only by scholars and antiquarians. But this immortal book is the contemporary of all ages. It talks in the speech, and with the accents of each generation in turn. The silver cord of the Bible is not loosed nor its golden bowl broken as centuries slip by, like beads on the thread of time. The Bible, says Theodore Parker, is the master of

the soul, wiser than reason, truer than conscience, greater and more trustworthy than the religious instinct itself.

The scale on which it is perpetually multiplied is only one proof of the stupendous force of the Bible. One English society alone has translated it into four hundred languages, and prints six million copies of it annually. This tiny volume, moreover—the work of nameless men, and, taken humanly, the annals of a perished race—has somehow created a vaster literature about itself than any other book that can be named. No other book has called into existence—for attack, for defense, for illustration, for proof, and for disproof—so many volumes. The sixty-six pamphlets which make it up are, in mass, about one-three-hundredth part of extant Greek and Roman literature; works which, taken intellectually, are the classics of all time. Yet the Bible has given birth to a vaster literature than all the Greek and Roman classics put together, and yet is not itself submerged. It rises high above the literature devoted to its exposition like the oak above the leaves of last

year's spring. "The little ark of Jewish literature," says Henry Rogers, "floats upon the surges of time, while the wrecked archives of huge Oriental empires are turned into mere flotsam and jetsam."

How often this book has been torn to rags, refuted, destroyed! But the anvil outlasts all the hammers that smite it. The men who attack the Bible, the volumes written to disprove it, are forgotten, while the immortal Book lives on. The Bible, too, survives its friends as well as its enemies. The Psalms have outlived Tate and Brady, Sternhold and Hopkins. The histories of the Bible are cut into fragments by the dissecting knives of scholars, and yet, somehow, they keep the unity that belongs to life. Some strange gift of indestructible life is hidden in this volume. History is strewn with the wrecks of a hundred perished literatures; but time has no destroying office for the biblical records. Great nations are only remembered, indeed, as embalmed in them. "Some nations and empires," says Henry Rogers, "are not forgotten, only because the Bible has occasion

to mention them." Some element not born of human genius, but which outshines genius, lies in its pages. Other books have their day and they die. Their language grows obsolete. The world's thought runs in new channels, and they are left mere stranded wrecks on time's shore. But this book belongs to all the centuries, and outlives them all.

"A planless book," a "book of scraps," men call it. And yet it has the indestructible unity which life alone gives. If tried only as a poem is tried, and by purely literary tests, the Bible is a great epic, with the unity of plan that belongs to an epic. It has a lost paradise at the beginning, a paradise regained at the end, with a divine redeeming process running through thousands of years, linking both visions together. One sublime idea shines behind the many books of the Bible. It is the recovery of a fallen race; the rebuilding of the kingdom of God in human life. And the instrument of this great process is Jesus Christ. The Bible is nothing but a frame of historical events in which Christ is set. All the early books of the

Bible prepare for him, whisper of him, point to him; all the later books look back to him. Under all its forms the Bible is thus the servant of one idea.

And the unity which is thus revealed, it must be repeated, is the product of human elements which seem in utter discord with each other. Here is an unknown number of writers, belonging to different races, born under different skies, parted by centuries from each other, with no common plans, and most of them visibly without any notion that what they write is to be part of the Bible of the human race. These are the elements not of unity, but of discord.

Imagine sixty-six compositors scattered over the world, each man setting up some solitary word, without any knowledge of what the other sixty-five were to produce. And lo! the sixty-six words when put together fall into what may be called lyrical relations with each other. They make not merely an intelligent sentence, but a poem, with linked sweetness of rhythm, and chiming harmonies; a poem of which the sense is not only clear, but rises to one sublime

climax. Could anything less than a miracle produce the rhythm of a perfect sonnet from a number of words set up independently? There *must* be a single controlling Mind behind the words to explain the poem.

Or, to vary the figure, the Bible is a portrait. The face of Christ looks out, tender, pure, divine, if with varying clearness, from every page. Is it credible that sixty-six chance daubs, of chance colors, made without agreement betwixt themselves by a number of chance men, could produce a Face that arrests the attention, and stirs the love of the world?

The Bible, tried by ordinary tests, is thus the great puzzle of all literature. What is the explanation of the puzzle? To give the answer of Christian faith in Christian terms, the secret of the Bible lies in the fact that it is not the product of human genius, it does not reflect the mind or record the discoveries of man. It reflects the mind of God. It is a channel through which runs a stream of spiritual force. It is not a discovery but a revelation. It is, to use terms of theology, a divinely inspired book.

About the inspiration of the Bible there are many theories and many perplexities. The notion of a mechanical inspiration, a force which blotted out the individuality of the writers, and used them as unconscious pens—mere pipes through which the divine stream flowed—is not necessary to Christian faith, and is not, as a matter of fact, held by any large section of the Christian Church.

A verbal inspiration, coextensive with the Bible, is unnecessary for the ends of the Bible, and is inconsistent with the facts of the Bible. Such an inspiration would be useless to us today; for if it was given to the original documents of Scripture, it is canceled by the fact that these have long since perished. It is discredited by the fact that there is in the Bible visibly no great care taken to insure an exact verbal uniformity in different reports of the same event. When the four evangelists give some memorable saying of Christ, each one records it with some slight variation of details and phraseology. There are variations in the reports of some of the most solemn words ut-

tered by Christ, such, for example, as the words employed in the Last Supper. The records, it is true, are absolutely uniform in spirit and meaning: the variations only prove the independency of the writers.

A verbal inspiration governing every word of the Bible is discredited, again, by the fact that, while there are some two hundred and sixty-three direct quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament, scarcely any one of these is verbally accurate. "It has not pleased God," says Dr. Pope, "to bind up his eternal truth absolutely and inseparably for good and evil in documents which perish in the using."

What the general faith of the Christian Church holds is the plenary inspiration of Scripture; an inspiration which, when necessary, is verbal, but which always is sufficient to insure the full and accurate conveyance of the truth to be revealed.

This divine element in the Bible explains that strange and separate note of tranquil certainty which runs through it. It does not argue, it announces. It is not concerned to *prove* the

foundation truths of religion, the existence and holiness of God, the eternal authority of righteousness, the moral nature of man, the fact of sin, and of a redemption from sin, the final judgment that awaits all human deeds. It assumes these truths; it proclaims them. They are not matters for debate; they are not to be justified by anxious syllogisms. They are certainties, certainties that find their attestation in the soul itself. The Bible, in a word, offers us not a philosophy or an argument, but a message. Its accent is not that of a human teacher catching the broken vision of truths far off and dimly seen, and striving to utter and prove them. The note is always one of authority; its accent that of a divine revelation, not of a human discovery.

The force in the Bible we call inspiration explains, again, the indestructible power of the book; a power of which the writers themselves were unconscious, and which certainly cannot be accounted for by any genius in them. No one can pretend that a handful of untaught Jews—herdsmen, fishermen, peasants—out-

scale in intellectual literary power all the great names not only of Greek and Latin literature but of the literature of all races and of all ages. Who will compare, as far as natural genius is concerned, David with Homer, or John with Plato, or Peter with Marcus Aurelius? There was only one scholar and man of genius—Paul—in the group of New Testament writers.

To take the personal and intellectual elements in the writers and try to explain the Bible by them is like taking the dead wire, the metal switch, the loop of calcined fibers, which are the machinery of an electric lamp, and offering *them* as an explanation of the electric light itself. These things are but the channel of the subtle, invisible force running back into mystery, that we call electricity. When anybody can explain the electric light without an electric current then we may explain the Bible without a divine inspiration. Visibly there is something more in the book than there was in the men who wrote it, and this mysterious and magnificent *plus* is the divine energy we call inspiration.

And this has to be said about the Bible—this is too commonly the forgotten thing about it; its inspiration is not something lying far back in distant centuries when the books were first written. It is a fact in the present tense! It is a force affecting the readers of today as well as the writers of yesterday. For the man who reads it with believing eyes the Bible is still flooded from cover to cover with inspiration. It thrills in every syllable with more than elemental forces, forces which penetrate to the very heart of the reader and stir all its deeper emotions as the moon stirs the sea tides. SOMETHING is in the book which breaks out—now in one place, now in another—with pulses of spiritual energy, gleams of unearthly light. It is as though first one cluster of words and then another become suddenly and strangely luminous. For the devout soul the Bible is always a book of divinest magic.

CHAPTER II

The Logic of the Bible

The Word of God is the book of the common people; it is the workingman's book; it is the child's book; it is the slave's book; it is the book of every creature that is downtrodden; it is the book that carries with it the leaven of God's soul; it is a book that tends to make men larger and better and sweeter, and that succors them all through life; and do you suppose it is going to be lost out of the world? When the Bible is lost out of the world it will be because there are no men in it who are in trouble and need succoring; no men who are oppressed and need release; no men who are in darkness and need light; no men who are hungry and need food; no men who are sinning and need mercy; no men who are lost and need the salvation of God.—Henry Ward Beecher.

Where shall we discover a logic wide and deep and lofty enough to justify Christian faith as to the Bible? There are a thousand proofs which professional apologists recite and array in scientific order: its survival through so many ages, its fulfilled prophecies, its profound agreement with history, its supremacy over all purely human literature, the miracles of yesterday which it records, and the miracles, also, of

today which it works. But an instructed Christian would be content to risk the whole case of the Bible on three facts which are beyond all successful challenge.

The first is the fact that the Bible is the one key which unlocks the puzzle of the world. Its interpretation of the spiritual history of the race is true. No other covers all the facts, no other is so much as thinkable.

If we grasp the underlying meaning of the Bible, we shall see that it assumes to be the record of a great spiritual process, a process older than itself, wider than itself, and one still in operation. That great and divine process is the religious education of the race. And who looks at history in the light of this philosophy sees that beneath all outward events this is exactly what has taken place, and is taking place. God, by his spirit touching the spirits of men, by his providence shaping the lives of men, has from the beginning been leading the race to "a divine, far-off event," and is still leading it. The process is a spiritual education; and human history is unintelligible, it

lacks both plan and goal, it is an epic without either a law or a climax, except on this theory.

Now, the lines of a moral evolution, a true spiritual education, shine clear in the history of the race. It begins with the first pair, placed in that fit scene for human childhood—a garden. The first lesson is that of obedience in its simplest terms, a single prohibition suited to what may be called the kindergarten stage of morals: "Don't touch that fruit!" as it might be expressed. Whether this story is truth in the form of parable, or truth in the form of history, it is equally convincing.

The lesson is not learned, the law is broken; the penalty is a lost paradise; and the first human pair come out—it is true, with a mysterious and uncomprehended promise in their hands—but it is to have the old lesson repeated under new and sterner conditions. They have sinned. They have now to be taught what sin is, and what it costs—a bitter truth, to be learned only through suffering. And history must be the schoolmaster.

Sin, it is shown, destroyed that first paradise;

it wrecks the first home; it goes on to corrupt the world, till God washes his earth clean with the flood, and starts the race afresh with a single family; a family who have the sign of hope shining in the skies above them, and one tremendous tradition, as to the cost of sin, behind them.

But a new stage has been reached, and a new lesson has now to be learned; the race is to be purged of idolatry, and is to be taught the truth that lies at the root of all religion, that God is One, and that he is a Spirit. To us this seems to belong to the very alphabet of religion, for we are the heirs of uncounted centuries of religious teaching; but to the race, and at the outset, it was the most difficult of truths, learned only through long ages of discipline. So a race has to be trained—trained by the lessons and sufferings of centuries—which shall be the channel and witness of this truth to the whole human family; and the divine method of doing this is visible in characters of light in the Bible.

Abraham is chosen as a starting point. We have, in orderly succession, a trained man, a

trained family, a trained nation, a nation whose history is to be the religious text-book of the world. The whole process is an evolution, and we see the chosen people—a people chosen for the service of the world, not for themselves—passing from one schoolroom to another.

Egypt is a schoolroom; and for four hundred years the Israelites are in it, until a group of Bedouins and nomads has become a nation, a nation fused and welded into unity by suffering, and rich in civilized arts. They come out from Egypt through the drama of the ten plagues, ten shattering blows struck at all the towering shapes of Egyptian idolatry; and that memory of overthrown gods is part of the equipment of the Israelites for their great office. The desert is a school, with its flaming Mount—its law of the Ten Words— a great advance on the single prohibition of paradise—its sufferings, its chain of miraculous deliverances, its mysterious tabernacle worship.

Palestine, again, is a schoolhouse, a little land no bigger than Wales, but shut in on every side from foreign invasion. And here

for nearly one thousand four hundred years the educational process goes on, fitting this people to be the channel of religious truths for the race.

It must be remembered that the very language of religion had to be created. Its great ideas of God, and of the character of God, of sin and of righteousness, and of the deep and eternal divorce betwixt them, had to be made visible and articulate. It took two thousand years to root the doctrine of one God—a truth lying at the foundation of religion—in the human conscience; and before the process was complete, of the twelve tribes ten had perished or disappeared from human sight because they refused to learn that truth.

Does this process, as recorded in the Bible, seem strangely and incredibly long? It is sufficient to reply that at the end of another two thousand years—in the twentieth century of Christian civilization—not one half of the human race has even yet learned that primary truth. In the British empire itself, the most Christian of states, three of its subjects out of

every five are still idolaters. The resisting power of human nature to divine truth, the slowness with which that truth is assimilated, is fatally underestimated.

The unhurrying development of this process is in harmony with God's methods in other realms. He did not call the earth into existence with a gesture; it had its beginning in some far-off fire mist, and has reached its present state under a law of secular and slow evolution. Whole ages are hidden in every bit of chalk; the light of suns that shone uncounted centuries ago shines in the gas jet that lights the pages of this book. If the schoolhouse took so long to build, surely it is for an education which is to be on the same time scale.

But when this primary doctrine that God is One—that he is holy, that his character is the reflex and the standard of duty—has been mastered by the one selected race, and is beginning to stain through from it to the general conscience of the world, then it is plain a new stage in the great educational process has been reached; and who looks at secular history at

that moment will see in it a curious arrest and pause. It is visibly one of the supreme moments of time. The civilization of the world is breaking down. Heathenism is bankrupt; Judaism itself is arrested. The race seems to stand

> . . . between two worlds: one dead,
> The other powerless to be born.

Then Christ comes, and Judaism, like a decayed husk which once held a grain of wheat, a grain which has now germinated, dies.

Now, this process, thus sketched in barest outline, is an interpretation of history which is intelligible, consistent, and which fits all the facts. What we see is a spiritual evolution, a process shaped on a single plan, and moving to a far-off and adequate goal. The human parties to it, it is true, are unconscious of the plan; but this is only one more proof of the fact that there is a Divine Mind behind the whole process. The plan, as a matter of fact, only becomes visible through the cloud of obscuring events, as we look *back* upon it in the perspective of many centuries.

This is visibly the true reading of human history. No other covers all the facts. No other reveals one golden thread of intelligible purpose running through the darkness. It is the story of the race as the Bible alone gives it; and so the Bible is the key, the only key, to the history of the world.

It is true that the record, as given in the Bible, is incomplete. It is only a book of what may be called samples, and the key to each separate book in the Bible itself is the ray of light it sheds on some part of the great process. God's providence, for example, is illustrated in such books as Ruth and Esther. The evolution of a language for religion is clearly the end of the whole ritual of the Jewish temple. The book of Psalms shows the ferment of spiritual life stirring in men's souls and uttering itself in lyrics of worship and aspiration. The Bible is unintelligible on any other reading than that here given: but so is human history.

The writers of the Bible, to turn to a new argument, were not philosophers, but somehow they discovered the whole philosophy, both of

duty and happiness; and this is the second fact which serves as the very watermark of divinity in the Bible. The secret of a living morality, the one effective formula for human conduct, is found in its pages, and is found nowhere else in literature.

What may be called the philosophy of a true morality is, as we now see it, sufficiently clear. It must have an adequate ideal as a standard; it must possess a sufficient spiritual energy as a driving force. In the Bible morality finds its sufficient ideal in the character of God, its effective energy in the love of God.

Now, to a degree which is unrealized and forgotten, the Bible, at this point, stands apart from all the religions of the world. We might naturally expect to find the highest levels of non-Christian morality in Greece, the land of art and literature, the home of the race that has given to the world the great masterpieces of literature, whose language was the mother tongue of Æschylus and Plato; or in Rome, with its august conception of law, and its capacity for government.

But in both Greece and Rome morality had no relation to religion, and did not even pretend to find any standard or sanction in the character of the gods. Morality was the business of the philosophers; religion, of the priests; and neither class meddled with the affairs that belonged to the other. Perhaps the subtlest and profoundest analysis of duty in Greek literature is supplied by Aristotle; and he does not even mention God as a factor in it! This, one might suggest, was fortunate for morality; for if all the divinities of Greece and Rome appeared in flesh and blood today, and performed the feats ascribed to them as gods and goddesses, they would be promptly handed over to the police.

The complete divorce of morality and religion is the characteristic of non-Christian faiths under every sky and in every age. A Greek philosopher was much occupied in discovering God and the Universal Cause; but, to quote Mosley,[1] of all questions there was not one which could make less practical difference

[1] Bampton Lectures, p. 76.

to the philosopher himself, or, in his view, to anybody else, than whether there was, or was not, a God. Nothing would have astonished him more than, when he had proved, in the lecture-hall, the existence of a God, to be told to worship him. "Worship Him!" he would have exclaimed; "worship what, worship how?" Men might uphold, in argument, an infinite abstraction; they could not worship it. The mythological hero was much better fitted for worship than the Universal Cause. He, at least, might be decently moral—if only in patches.

The Brahmanism of India today is another example of this complete absence of any relation betwixt human duty and the character of the gods. The Supreme Being of Brahmanism is, in the words of Mosley, "a characterless, impersonal essence, without action, without will." He is the substratum of everything, but himself is nothing. The rank and file of Hindu gods are nothing less than vile. India expressly exempts Hindu temples from the law against obscene pictures and carvings. If enforced, it would dismantle half the temples in India.

Now, the worship of corrupt gods must poison all the wells of morality. But it is equally true, though not so readily recognized, that morality divorced from a personal God, himself the standard and guard of morality, inevitably perishes. Phillips Brooks in one of his sermons asks us to imagine everything that belongs to the thought of God to be taken away, and to consider what must be the consequence. "Either the conscience," he says, "would be swept away, unable to stand alone, and mankind become a race of devils, or else conscience, in its sore need, would reach out its hands in the darkness, and find for itself a religion."

Presently he goes on to say: "As when before the sunrise millions of half-awakened particles of air are filled with dim suspicions of the coming sun, there would grow up, in countless hearts, perhaps as a misgiving, perhaps as a hope, the thought that the impulse toward righteousness in them—the force we call conscience—was but the echo of the will of some great Power that stood for righteousness; and

conscience in its trouble would begin to guess at forgiveness. "She could not tell its methods, she could not invent for herself the divine wonder of the cross; but, somehow, somewhere, she must hope that pardon and repair were waiting, and in the dim smoke of some altar she would send up her hope toward heaven for a God and Saviour."

Now, in the Bible the sun is risen. We have a spiritual reading of duty. We have first the doctrine of one God, a doctrine that after so many ages finds its reflex in the latest and surest conception of science, that the physical universe is a unit. This God, we next learn, is a Person; is himself of infinite righteousness; and human duty is but the reflex of his will. And duty, when thus set in relation to a personal God, himself of infinite righteousness, is seen to be measureless in range. It shuts round us with the insistent pressure of the atmosphere. It is lofty as the height of the heavens themselves, since it finds its law and pattern in the character of God.

Then comes the crown of all revelation, the

supreme inspiration of all duty. *This God loves us;* his love for us is expressed in mysterious suffering borne for us. He takes our flesh, that he may set us an example of obedience. He dies in a mysterious partnership with the consequences of our disobedience that he may deliver us.

Here is the spiritual energy which constitutes the driving force of duty. Here is the supreme argument for the hate of sin.

No one can deny that duty, as thus interpreted, and as thus reinforced, is the one effective formula of conduct for the race. And it is found alone in the Bible! True or false, the book offers to mankind the one solution of the supreme problem of human life. How did this little cluster of Jewish peasants discover what escaped all the sages and teachers of the most intellectual races in the world? The answer is, They did not discover it; it comes by revelation; and this revelation is found in the pages of the Bible.

The third fact which proves the Bible to be divine is that, somehow, it holds the secret, it

teaches the art, of happiness. The supreme end of the Bible, of course, is not enjoyment, but character. It treats happiness as one of the by-products of character. And its philosophy of happiness somehow *works* alike for the individual and for the race. Happiness is to be found in the laws the Bible teaches, and nowhere else.

There never *has* been a Golden Age in the stormy history of the human race; but one would arrive within the next twenty-four hours if the Bible suddenly became the universal rule of action. At present it is only half understood and less than half assimilated. But what of happiness the troubled earth knows comes from those laws of conduct taught in the Bible. And if we track back to their origin what may be called the running sores of civilization—the inequalities of social condition, the hatred of class against class, the cruelties of a social order built not on brotherhood but on selfishness, the mistrust betwixt civilized nations which finds expression in ever-expanding fleets and armies, the vices that blacken the life

of the world as with fire and waste it as with famine—each of these will be found to spring from some latent or open discord with the teachings of the Bible. Each would be healed if that tragical discord were hushed.

Let there be imagined one city on earth built absolutely on Christ's teaching, with brotherhood linking class to class, the Golden Rule the foundation of all business, and the law of love as the sole statute book. It would resemble nothing so much as the city John saw, in vision, descending out of heaven from God.

No other religious text-book in human literature would survive this test. Imagine the world shaped on the pattern of the Koran, with woman disrated and degraded; imagine the Atlantis of which Plato dreamed, with slavery as its base, the brothel elevated into a state institution, and children taught, "like young whelps, to scent carnage and be inured to slaughter"!

How did Peter and John succeed where Plato and Aristotle have failed? Where did the writers of the Bible learn the great secret

which has puzzled the wit and baffled the wisdom of all ages? They were not philosophers; yet, somehow, they mastered a profounder wisdom than philosophy can teach. The answer is: It came to them, not as a human discovery, but as a divine revelation. He who drew the plan of man's nature alone knows the secret of man's happiness! He has told that secret in the Bible. And "if the Bible, so attested by universal Providence under the law of the survival of the fittest, is not, on the whole, a trustworthy religious guide, then," says Joseph Cook, "God has put around the orb of human experience a Saturn's ring of coruscating falsehood."

CHAPTER III

The Difficulties of the Bible

In divinity, many things must be left abrupt and concluded with this: "Oh, the depth!". . . For the inditer of Scripture did know four things which no man attains to know: the mysteries of the kingdom of glory, the perfection of the law and of nature, the secrets of the heart of man, and the future succession of all ages.—Bacon.

There are, of course, a thousand difficulties in the Bible—mysteries that puzzle the intellect, and limitations that vex it; ethical crudities that startle the conscience, imperfections of knowledge which distress faith. So far from any instructed faith denying the existence of these difficulties, it accepts them as constituting part of the very evidence that the Bible is divine. How could a book which undertakes to give, in the speech and thought of finite men, a revelation of the Infinite, be without mysteries? A sea in which a child could safely wade is not the water on which great ships can sail.

Do we covet a revelation which would explain all mysteries? That it proposed to achieve such a task would prove it to be in quarrel with the very plan of our earthly life. If it succeeded in its task, it would overwhelm the human mind with knowledge too large for comprehension, too vast for use. Man's intellect, beneath such a revelation, would be destroyed, killed by mere excess of light, as the human eye might be destroyed, scorched into blindness by a flame too intense.

Butler's profound argument, based on the analogy betwixt the Bible and the constitution of the world, is still triumphant; no answer to it is thinkable. The material world and the written Word are both God's instruments for the training of the race, and they have the same characteristics; for God's system of government is a unit. The spiritual world is on the same plan with the material. Each is constructed for ends of character, each seeks its ends by methods of discipline.

A world without a puzzle, where everything was known, and no truth was hidden so deep

that only toil could find it, would enervate the reason. A world without a hardship, that had no whip of need for sloth, no call for sweat of brain and muscle, where food came without toil and pleasure without effort, would be fatal to the body. Man under such conditions would resemble nothing so much as a shellfish glued to a rock, and drowned in a sea of supply.

We need the spur of want in nature, the sting of pain, the challenge of mystery to make us men. The world is a grindstone, and in a grindstone roughness is a merit. A grindstone of jelly would sharpen no knife.

And all this can be translated into spiritual terms and applied to the Bible. That it is a revelation limited and partial, a revelation that yields its light only to earnest search, that it is capable of being misread, nay, that it *will* be misread, if looked at with a bias bred of dislike, or even with merely careless eyes—all this is only to say that the Bible, like nature, is an instrument shaped by God for ends of discipline. It is a book written not to save the human mind from effort but to rouse it to effort.

The ethical difficulties of the Bible are due, in part, to the fact that the Bible represents an educational process, and its lessons are in an ascending scale. Rules come first, principles next; love, as both the energy and the interpretation of duty, last of all. This is the philosophical order; it is, in the Bible, the order of history. This explains why the morality of the Jewish times and of the Jewish race was not, and could not be, the morality of the twentieth Christian century. David, in the Psalms, no doubt, sometimes expresses what we should today call non-Christian sentiments, but then David belonged to the eighth century before Christ, not the twentieth century after him.

It is sometimes asked, with a certain note of triumph by those who hate the Bible, and in disquieted accents by those who love it: "Does it not include some errors of fact, or of science?" But the very form of the question is misleading. Suppose it be asked: "Are there errors in Shakespeare?" The obvious answer would be that Shakespeare's writings are dramatic and pictorial; they reproduce ancient

forms of speech, obsolete habits of thought, lives set under other conditions of knowledge than exist today. And in the degree in which the dramatist is true to life he will depict his characters as speaking and acting according to the conditions of their own time.

But Butler's great argument may be carried further. The personal Word—the Word made flesh—and the written word—the Bible—have profound resemblances. Each in turn is a paradox, the disappointment of all natural expectations; each has the same difficulties, the same apparent limitations. If a committee of philosophers had been appointed to imagine an incarnation—the entrance into a race fallen into discord with the laws of the Maker of that race—in what terms would such a committee have pictured the incarnate God making his appearance?

Would they have guessed that he would come as a Jew, a peasant, a Galilean carpenter, without wealth or learning, with a ministry stretching through only three brief years? Would they have supposed that, coming as a

Teacher, he would have left not a single written sentence of his teaching behind him? Above all, would they have guessed that he would come into life by the door of the manger, and go out of it by the sad gate of the cross? What a bundle of incredibilities such an incarnation would—in advance—have seemed! Yet the ministry of Christ, under exactly these conditions, has remade, and is remaking, the world.

And all this is true of the Bible. In form, as we have seen, it is a paradox. It hides amazing energy under a mask of weakness, just as a speck of radium, microscopic in dimensions, is a fire-fountain, pouring forth energies that are the puzzle of science. It is a book that challenges curiosity but refuses to satisfy it, that tells us little where we think it might tell us much. It is saturated with mysteries.

But the Bible is meant to be a discipline for reason, not a substitute for it. It has no treasures for idle hands, no truth for careless brains, no light for eyes that love darkness and want only darkness.

The Bible, it may be added, is perhaps the

worst used book in literature. What other volume has been turned to such sad uses, has had such strange meanings read into it or wrung out from it? What was meant to be a medicine has been turned into a weapon, not to say a poison. The Book, intended to be the garden of the Lord, has been turned into a human battlefield. What evil fires have raged over its pages, fires that might well blacken the whole landscape! But the fires pass, and, scarred by no blackness, the divine landscape of the Bible emerges afresh with its blossoming flowers, its sound of running waters, its majesty of purple hills rising to the sky. The souls of ever-new generations drink of its clear streams and lie down in its green pastures.

PART II

THE ALTERNATIVES TO CHRISTIAN FAITH ABOUT THE BIBLE

CHAPTER I

Is the Bible a Forgery?

The integrity of the records of the Christian faith is substantiated by evidence, in a tenfold proportion, more various, copious, and conclusive than that which can be adduced in support of any other ancient writings.—Isaac Taylor.

To attack the Bible is easy; to discover doubts about it is a business which does not greatly tax the intellect. But those who reject the Bible are bound to supply an explanation for it. Doubt about the Bible is itself, of course, an explanation, for every denial is but an affirmation reversed. When the proposition, "The Bible is true," is rejected there must be some rival proposition, latent or expressed, which is affirmed to be more credible. What, then, are the alternatives to the Christian faith about the Bible? They are curiously few, and are perfectly definite.

The first is the theory that the whole book is a forgery. It represents nothing better than the invention of rogues. The events it describes

never happened. There never was a Jewish nation; prophets and psalmists and evangelists, are mere fictions. No Christ ever lived who spoke the parables and wrought the miracles of the gospel; no churches were in existence to whom the epistles were actually addressed. The Bible is an unhistoric Grimm's Fairy Tales or Alice in Wonderland.

This, everyone will admit, is a very clumsy and stupid explanation of the Bible. No scholar will make himself responsible for it. Anyone with the faintest touch of the historic sense will smile at it. The smallest acquaintance with the book itself makes this theory ridiculous. It is, in fact, an incredibility so vast that its acceptance is the master effort of human credulity.

We are asked to believe that the Book which in every sentence rebukes falsehood, is itself the product of a scheme of fraud—a fraud without a motive—stretching through ages, running from land to land, from race to race, from century to century. Its writers are the most stupendous procession of liars that ever marched through history. What spectacle can

be imagined more amazing than this, of a vast and unknown company of rogues, toiling like missionaries, and dying as martyrs, to palm off on the human race a book which whips lying with sternest penalties through this world and the next?

If the writers were good men, it is incredible that they should try to beguile the race into goodness by the arts of rogues. But if they are bad men, it is still more wildly incredible that they should invent a book intended to persuade men into goodness, by any means whatever. If the Bible be a forgery, too, we may well reflect in speechless wonder on the miraculous cleverness of the forgery. For this is a fraud interwoven with history, and running all the risks to which a lie is exposed when it touches history. It is knitted, at a hundred points, to actual events; it is interwoven with the doings of real men and women by coincidences so deep and so hidden that today—nearly two thousand years after this great literary lie was finished, and the liars who invented it are dead—we are only just finding them out.

The Bible as a forgery must be pronounced not only the most audacious and circumstantial but the most miraculously successful fraud in history. For, somehow, it is attested by independent evidence, witnessed by great institutions, authenticated by monuments only just dug out of the sand of centuries. It has created the Christian religion. If it be a forgery, it must have lain open, at the very moment of its publication, to instant and scornful detection. How, in fact, could such a fable have crept out into the light and escape being branded as a lie on the spot? How could the apostles, for example, tell in Jerusalem itself the story of Christ's miracles and teaching, of the trial in Pilate's hall, of the scene on Calvary, when everybody in the city must have known the whole tale to be an invention? And from its very nature—its pretensions to be history, and to be the explanation of history—the chances of detection must have multiplied against the Bible with every day that passed. And yet it has escaped detection! It challenges all disproof!

Suppose some historian produced a book designed to show that the Norman Conquest never took place, that William the Conqueror was a myth, Hastings a fable, the Doomsday Book a forgery, etc. Such a theory would leave modern England itself unintelligible. The social life, the institutions, the legal code, the very landscape of England are the witnesses of that far-off historical event. And it may be said with confidence that the social life, the laws, the literature, the very landscape of the civilized world, are witnesses against the theory that the Bible is a mere forgery. "If Christ," says Fairbairn,[1] "had not been what he was, and stood where he did, could anything in history be as it has been, or as it is? May we not speak of him as the keystone of the arch which spans the gulf of time? But can we conceive that the keystone came there by accident, or otherwise than by the hand which built the bridge, which opened the chasm, and determined the course of the river that flows beneath?"

[1] Philosophy of the Christian Religion, p. 567.

The theory which dismisses the Bible as a literary fraud, a book of fables, deserves nothing but intellectual contempt. It asks more credulity for its acceptance than the whole Christian scheme requires of sober faith.

CHAPTER II

Is the Bible Only One of the Sacred Books of the Race?

These non-Christian Bibles are all developments *in the wrong direction.* They begin with some flashes of true light, and end in utter darkness.—Professor Monier Williams.

The second alternative, a little less visibly and instantly absurd than the theory of forgery, is that the Bible is one of the many sacred books of the world, a little better than others, perhaps, but belonging to the same general class. There is a whole library of these ethnic Bibles—the Mohammedan Koran, the Buddhist Canon of Sacred Scriptures, the Zend-Avesta, the Vedas, etc. The study of comparative religions has, in fact, grown to a science. These "Bibles" express the spiritual life, the aspirations, the superstitions, the guesses of the nation to which they belong; and the Christian Bible, it may be contended, belongs to this class.

It is only a page—or even a single column—in a great biblical polyglot.

No inspiration need be postulated for it on this theory any more than for the Vedas or for the Koran. No divine authority is hidden in its syllables. The conscience owes it no allegiance, and faith no surrender. It is simply one of the many forms in which the religious impulse, which forms an indestructible part of human nature, has found historic expression. The Christian Bible, perhaps, is better in some respects than the other ethnic Bibles; but it has a similar origin. The whole question is one of scientific classification.

No one who knows the facts would hesitate to risk the whole case for the Bible on this single point. Classification is a question of science. It is determined by a study of structure, of agreements and differences in the things compared. And no instructed science can possibly put the Bible in the same category with the so-called sacred books of other religions. Not only does it breathe another atmosphere and talk another language than they, it is built on

another plan. Alike by what it omits and by what it includes, it is unique.

It is not like the "Bibles" of other races, a mass of clotted superstition, a nightmare of insane dreams, saturated with immorality—in which only stray passages that show a gleam of truth can be discovered.

The Bible resembles an inhabited landscape. It is human, ordered, rational; it shows everywhere the characters of mind, and of mind working on plan. But the sacred books of heathen nations resemble the world of prehistoric times, with dragons tearing each other in the slime, and strange shapes splashing through the hot and shallow seas, and dimly visible through the stifling mists. Who would dare to dwell in such a scene, or to wander in such companionship?

If we judge the Bible, again, not by what it omits but by what it includes, we find that it is parted from the Bibles of heathendom by at least three profound differences.

It is, for one thing, the only monotheistic Bible known to history—allowing for the

Koran, which, in a sense, is its offspring. And science, which has learned that the material system of things is a unit, can only smile at the polytheistic extravagances, the multiple creators and creations of the other sacred books of the world. The Bible, again, is a book knitted together through all its parts by a single great idea—the idea of a divine salvation being wrought out for men. And, finally, it links religion, at every point, to morality. It is monotheistic, it is ethical, it is structurally a unit; here are three fundamental differences betwixt the Bible and all its rivals.

The intellectual interval betwixt the Bible and all the other so-called sacred books, is vast; but the moral interval is past measuring. No one, for example, would dare to print in English an unexpurgated edition of the sacred books of the East; their "sacredness" includes some very vile elements.

Professor Monier Williams is one of the greatest authorities on these ethnic Bibles, and he has given his opinion of them in memorable words: "These non-Christian Bibles," he says,

"are all developments *in the wrong direction.* They all begin with some flashes of true light, and end in utter darkness. . . . Pile them, if you will, on the left side of your study table; but place your Holy Bible on the right side, all alone, and with a wide gap between."[1]

No scholar of modern times more completely saturated himself with the literature of these ethnic Bibles than did Professor Max Müller; but he brought from the experience a reinforced faith in Christianity. "Christ," he says, "spoke a new language, a language, no doubt, liable to be misunderstood, as all language is, but a language which has imparted a new glory to the whole face of the world. Christianity involves a complete change in the spiritual condition of mankind; it marks the great turning point in the history of the world."[2]

"Christ," he says, again, "is the fulfillment of all the world has been longing for and striving after."

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[1] Speech in London, before the English Church Missionary Society, 1887.

[2] Anthropological Religion, p. 380.

"How shall I describe," he says, writing to a friend, "what I found in the New Testament? I had not read it for many years, and was prejudiced against it before I took it in hand. The light which struck Paul with blindness on his way to Damascus was not more strange (than that which fell on me) when I suddenly discovered the fulfillment of all hopes, the highest perfection of philosophy, the key to all the seeming contradictions of the physical and moral world. The whole world seemed to me to be ordered for the sole purpose of furthering the religion of the Redeemer; and if this religion is not divine, I understand nothing at all. In all my studies of the ancient times I have always felt the want of something, and it was not until I knew our Lord that all was clear to me. With him there is nothing I am unable to solve."

When concluding a lecture at Manchester on the Vedas he said: "No one who has not examined patiently and honestly the other religions of the world can know what Christianity really is or can join with such truth and sin-

cerity in the words of Saint Paul, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.'" When Max Müller himself was dying a friend bent over him and whispered in his ears the completion of that great verse—"For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." "Yes," said the dying man, trying to raise his voice, "and from that I have never wavered." Almost his last words were the words of Isaiah: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." The translator of The Sacred Books of the East turned from them to the Bible in search of a charm that could sweeten his life, and rob his dying hour of darkness.

The theory that the Bible is simply one of the many sacred books known to history, with no greater pretensions to divine authority than they possess, cannot be sustained for a moment. The attempt to put the Bible in the same category, say, with the Zend-Avesta or the Vedas is like trying to place Canterbury Cathedral in the same class with the grass hut of an African savage.

CHAPTER III

Is the Bible a Book of Dreams?

I know that the Bible is God's book because it is man's book, because it fits into every fold and turn of human experience.—Arthur Hallam.

It is impossible to dismiss the Bible as having been forged by a committee of rogues; it is equally impossible to put it aside as being merely the crystallized superstitions and aspirations of a particular race. But there is a third explanation possible, much more respectful, if not plausible, than either of these. The Bible, on this theory, represents the dreams of a band of enthusiasts. It is a record of what a succession of good but deluded men wished to be true, imagined to be true, and ended by believing to be true. It is thus a book of delusions, with gleams of real truth shining here and there through the mist; but it is uninspired and unhistoric. It has many valuable elements which

a wise man will select, and the rest he may at pleasure reject.

This theory does not quarrel with science by classing unlike things together; and, further, it escapes—or seems to escape—the absurdity of holding that the one Book in the world which is the servant and teacher of truth came into existence as the invention of a conspiracy of liars. But does it really escape from this incredible folly?

The truth is that the Bible, like Christ, shuts men up to a narrow and inevitable choice. It is certain that no half-way judgment about Christ is possible. He cannot be attenuated into a dream, or be politely waved off the stage of history as an interesting and harmless enthusiast. If Christ is not God, he is not even a good man. He must be a lunatic or a knave—a dilemma that shocks both common sense and natural feeling, but from which there is no escape.

It is exactly so with the Bible, and the men who wrote the Bible. The writers of this Book are not poets dwelling in a realm of the imagination; they are not philosophers weaving

some more or less ingenious explanation of the universe; they are not advocates arguing for victory. They claim to be witnesses to plain facts.

They walk on the common earth; they bring us not arguments, but a personal experience. "That which . . . we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life"—this is the substance of their message. They claim to offer us, it must be repeated, not speculations but facts; not syllogisms but a history; and they do this with the accents and the authority of personal witnesses.

Now, either the story is true, or the witnesses lie. There is no half-way stage betwixt these two positions. And the writers of the New Testament, it may be added, gave the strongest proof of their sincerity. They lived only to tell their story, they died as martyrs for their story. And if the facts are not as they describe them—facts which they themselves say they have seen with their eyes, and their hands have handled—then they are simply a procession of liars, and

of the most wonderful liars that ever defiled through history. For they were liars not only without a motive and without a reward, but without a purpose.

Those who hold this remarkable theory may well be asked to answer two plain questions: First, *why* should the writers of the New Testament have invented this story? It did not bring them riches. It did not open the pathway to power. The only earthly reward it brought them was the scourge, the sword, the stake. It is sometimes argued that what may be called the Messianic hopes of the Jews explain the fable of Christ. The Jews expected a Messiah; and as he failed to appear, they invented one. But Christ, it is clear, was, from the Jewish point of view, the *wrong* Messiah; he disappointed every hope, insulted every tradition, and shocked every expectation of the Jewish mind. A committee of Jewish peasants who set about either imagining or inventing a concrete Messiah would certainly have produced quite another figure to that of Jesus Christ.

But it may be asked not only why *should,* but how *could,* the Jews of that day invent the matchless Gospels, with their radiant beauty and lofty ethical ideals? It takes a Jesus to imagine a Jesus. That a company of Jews—of Galilean Jews, of Jews in the time of Nero—the narrowest group of the most bigoted race, in its darkest hour, could invent a story which, if it be only a poem or a dream, leaves the whole literature of the world surpassed—this is the last of incredibilities.

How does it come to pass, it may be asked, that where Plato and Aristotle failed, Peter the fisherman and Paul the tentmaker succeeded? For they have certainly given us a system of ethics, and even a philosophy of ethics, which is to all others known to literature what Alpine snows are to the mud of city streets. How do they come, again, to give us a religion so generous in its spirit that it overleaps all the separating gulfs of race, and climate, and speech? This is not Jewish, but the antithesis of everything Jewish.

An attempt is sometimes made to explain the

Bible by an easy and specious generalization. What Greek intellect was in philosophy, and Roman genius in the art of government, the Hebrew mind is in religion; so it is customary to say the Bible is simply the expression in literature of the Hebrew mind. But the explanation will not, for a moment, hold good. The Hebrew mind is in the world today; it is quick and fertile in art, daring in politics, grasping in business; but it is, perhaps, the least spiritual type of mind the race knows. The Hebrew mind, for one brief, golden hour, was the channel through which the Spirit of God flowed into human history; but the channel is not the river.

We have in the Talmud the measure of what Hebrew genius, unassisted, can do in the realm of religion. Paley dismissed the contention that the early Christian writers invented the Gospels by the consideration that, judged by their other known writings, it is perfectly certain they *could* not have performed that feat. And how could the men who wrote the Talmud have possibly written the Gospels? A perfectly

competent authority, Professor Margoliouth, says: "The fatal want of the Jewish mind, judged by the Talmud, is a want of originality. They can borrow, they cannot invent. The moment Jewish literature separates itself from the Bible originality perishes.

"How," he asks, "are we to reconcile with this most patent want of originality the extraordinary phenomenon of such a race having produced a literature which, after having once taken its place at the head of the literature of the world, has no intention of quitting that post? The lost literatures that come to light rarely have any value of their own. Egypt and Assyria produced monuments which were long lost, but now are found and deciphered. Who reads them except out of mere curiosity, or to aid him in some other study? Indian literature is now as easy of access as Greek, but who cares for it? One or two isolated morsels, perhaps, are known beyond professional circles, but nothing else. The Bible itself explains this problem by the theory that the best of Israelitish literature was communicated to its authors

from *without*—that it was the result of special favors conferred on privileged members of the race. 'Men spake as they were moved.' The nation, which of itself could do nothing for science or philosophy, which could not observe and could not experiment, which could not compile a grammar nor invent a meter, produced the books which, owing to the profundity of their contents, 'the first man did not fully know, and the last man has not sounded to the bottom.' Truly, this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."[1]

[1] Lines of Defense of the Biblical Revelation, p. 254.

EPILOGUE

Where does this course of argument leave us? At the lowest reading of the evidence the Christian faith, it may be claimed with absolute confidence, emerges from the debate undestroyed. It has mysteries which must wait for other light than earthly skies know before they disappear. It has difficulties which only a larger wisdom than that the mind now possesses can solve; but the general faith of Christendom certainly suffers no disproof. The most eager critic will not claim that it can be so disproved, that it is safe to disregard it. And it is madness to forget that the moral obligations of Christianity survive until the point of final disproof is attained.

That point, it must be repeated, is not reached; it *cannot* be reached; and so the authority of Christianity as a scheme of life remains. For the amplest doubt, while yet it is only a *doubt,* is no discharge from action; while

even an imperfect faith justifies an absolute obedience.

But as a study in alternatives, what room is left to a sane mind for hesitation betwixt the Christian faith and the rival creeds, disguised as "doubts," which claim its place? We try to escape choice betwixt these opposites; we think we *do* escape. But we can only do this by shutting our eyes to the beliefs behind our unbelief. They exist; they claim—they seize, as by right—the place in our lives we deny to Christianity. We criticise, we speculate, and think this is the sum of what we do. But all the while we do something else. We live; we act; and life and action must have a creed.

And, thank God, there are multitudes who walk in the gloom, and even live in the very anguish of doubt, and yet keep the ethics of faith. They are in the kingdom of God, though they know it not. "Blessed are they," said Christ, "that have not seen and yet have believed." And surely he would say, too, "Blessed are they who lack the clear light of faith, and yet yield the obedience of faith."

But what about those who cherish doubt as a sort of luxury, or try to evade the certainty of faith as if it were a bondage? What about those who, with an unconfessed moral or intellectual cowardice, try to escape giving *any* verdict on the great issues of religion? These need to be reminded that their very doubts *are* verdicts. They are creeds in disguise. What men need to see—and too commonly refuse to see—is the affirmatives of their doubts.

On the great question of God the alternatives, as we have seen, are atheism, pantheism, agnosticism; but how faint are the proofs which justify these theories considered as positive creeds! How thick and slab they are with difficulties! How insecure is the standing ground they offer! Who builds his life—and risks those issues larger than life which hang on faith—on the evidences for atheism, or for pantheism, or for agnosticism, is taking risks that may well appall the reason. Where Christianity asks a sober faith, these rival creeds owe their acceptance either to a desperate credulity which is the scandal of reason, or

to metaphysical sophistries which bewilder reason.

Or take, again, the inevitable alternatives to the Christian faith about Christ. Is it sane to risk all the tremendous issues of character and destiny on the theory that the loftiest and most potent figure in human history was nothing better than a shadow, the dream of a poet, or even the invention of a knave? If Christ be only a dream, is not the dream fairer than all reality? This is a dream, too, which somehow has changed the face of the world. Do dreams work such miracles? Has the face—the imaginary face—of a Galilean peasant, affected the world more profoundly than the brains of all philosophers, the swords of all warriors, the genius of all statesmen? Looked at as a creed, this theory is the wildest unreason.

We do not dwell on the more shocking theory still that Christ was a lunatic, or even an impostor. No sane person will make himself responsible for such an assertion. But take the theory that Christ is nothing better than the name of a myth, an accidental cluster of super-

stitions and fancies that, somehow, have clustered round this particular name. It is to be noted that even Strauss, before he died, gave up the myth theory; and anyone who realizes the part Christianity has played, and is yet to play, in history—anyone who behind all the dust and tumult of the world can hear "the mighty waters rolling evermore" that make up the stream of Christian influence—must reject as the idlest folly the explanation that resolves the source of that stream into a myth.

Christ cannot be dismissed without a verdict. If he be not the Teacher and the Redeemer of mankind, the question clamors for answer, "What is he?" Is he dream, myth, or impostor? Each of these theories, when considered as a definite creed, with its own evidences and difficulties, and its own ethics, is absolutely incredible.

All this may be said in turn of the Bible. Here is a book by which the best spirits of our race have lived and died. It is visibly the root of the best things in the world. Dying hands cling to it. Multitudes would join in

declaring it to be "the fountain light of all our day," the "master light of all our seeing." And what are the alternatives to Christian faith in the Bible? Is it to be dismissed as the invention of liars, the imagination of untaught peasants, the crystallized superstition of dark ages and perished races? It would need a very courageous logic indeed to attempt the proof of these theories as definite and positive creeds.

We are shut up to sharp and definite choice at all these supreme points. We cannot subsist on negatives. The business of the sane and honest intellect is to look at each doubt in turn as a positive creed, to try its evidences as those of Christianity are tried, to cast its difficulties into the same scales with the difficulties of Christianity, and then to extract from the whole process a sane law of conduct.

That law of conduct will assuredly be found to run in the path where the feet of Christ, and of all the saints of all the ages since Christ came, have trodden.

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